The Prairie and the Sea

William A Quayle

Some daily Scripture Readings
for the Lord of nature. First
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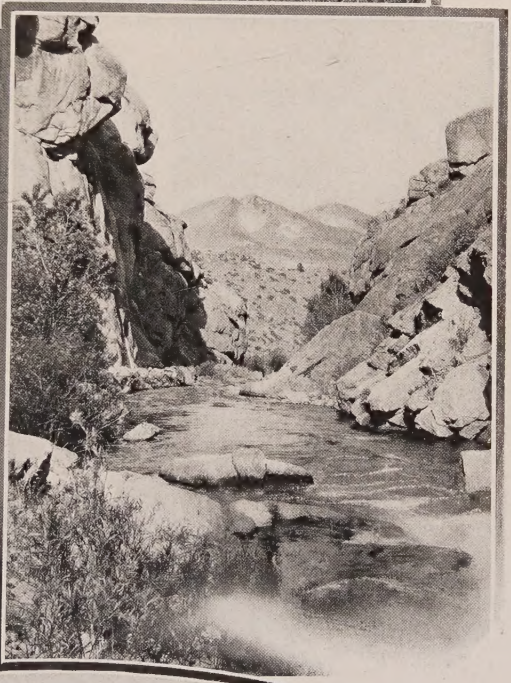
Church & Sunday School.

Thos. H. Hunkerley,

teacher.

The Prairie and the Sea.



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THE PRAIRIE AND THE SEA

BY

WILLIAM A. QUAYLE

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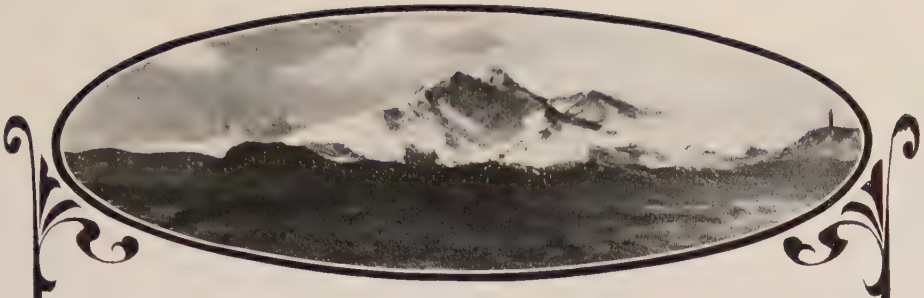
PREFACE

Only a Word of Greeting for all Lovers of Prairie and Sea, the Emerald Prairie and the Amethyst Sea.

May these Lovers be, not Decreased but Multiplied by the Reading of this Book, written by One of Themselves.



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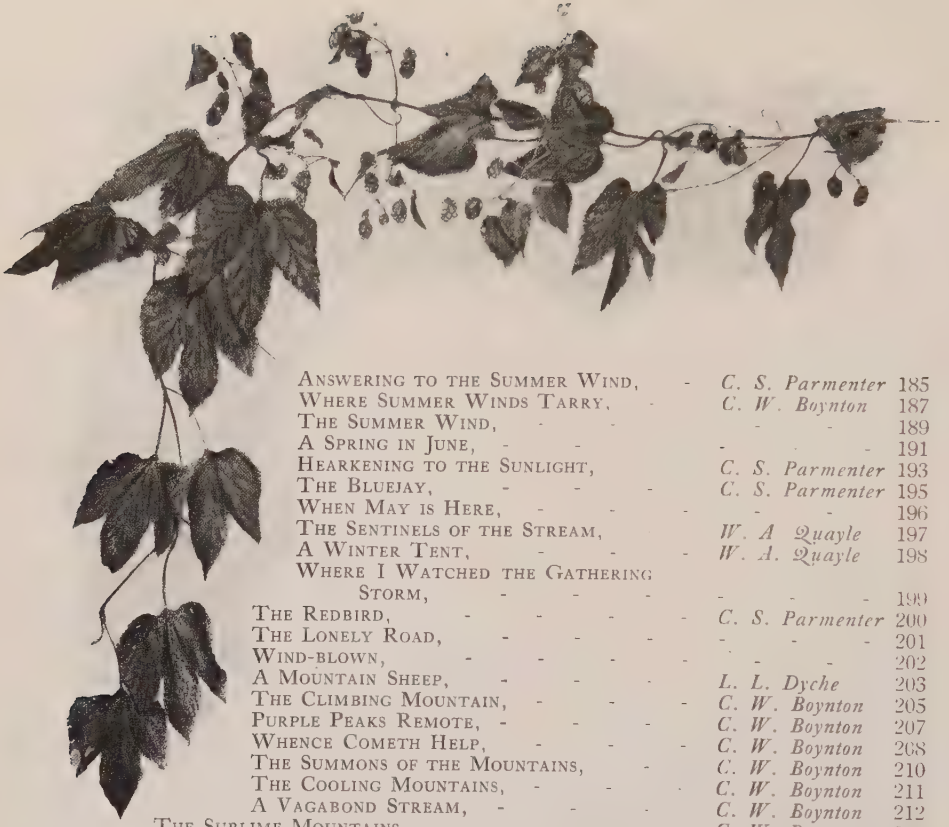

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WHERE SEA WAVES DASH

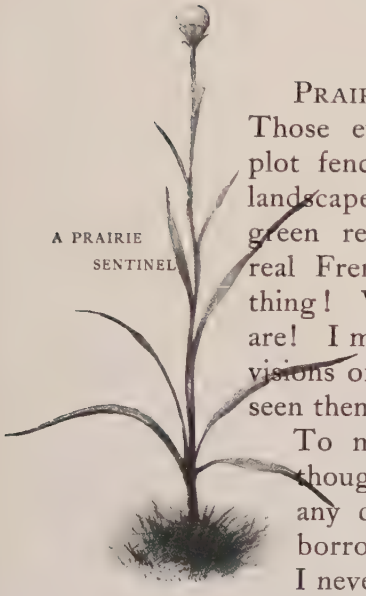
THE WAYSIDE CROSS

THE PRAIRIE

THE VOICE OF THE PRAIRIE NIGHT

WHERE PRAIRIE TOUCHES SKY

THE PRAIRIE



A PRAIRIE SENTINEL

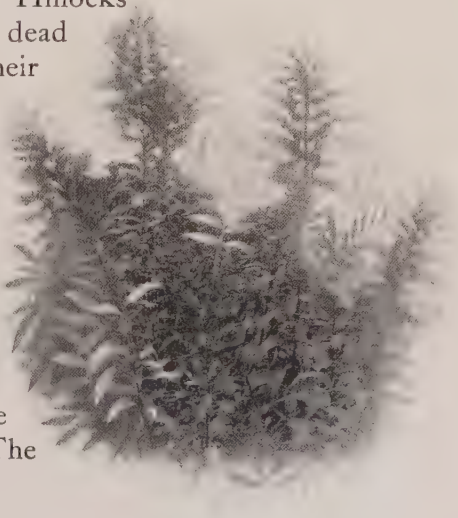
PRAIRIE is a French word meaning meadow. Those ever-going voyageurs, sighting a grass plot fenced only with the sky, thought of the landscape of their native land, and called the far, green reaches, meadow. What trivialities the real French prairies are, diminutive as a plaything! What dignitaries the American prairies are! I must always think them among the larger visions of our world, and pity such as have not seen them.

To my thinking, prairie is a happy word, though whether it is or not I can not with any degree of certainty tell, because names borrow fascinations. Ruth is a woman name I never can pronounce or hear without a sense of poetry, but am never sure whether the name's self is possessor of the poetry, or whether that first sweet gleaner in Boaz's barley-field has not, as by a chrysm, set that name among the subtle poetries along with the moonlight and dusk and the whip-poor-will and the fling of marching shadow across a dial and the tropic glow of a dandelion in the advent of the Spring. But so, Ruth, with me, stands for poetry; and her name is sweet and she sad, with her bare feet trampling the stubble behind the reapers, and her tawny fingers, with woman's suppleness, catching at the forgotten barley-heads,—Ruth is among the names to cast a spell on such as love to dream. But whether her name or she, who knows, and what matters? And in like quandary I find myself touching this word Prairie. Is it in its own

right fascinative, or in the right of that far reach of emerald which suffers itself to wear the name? I remain agnostic here. In any case, the name is my delight. My lips refuse to hurry when they touch this word, but fondle it, lover-wise, lingering as loath to say good-bye; pronouncing it Prai–rie, holding on the initial syllable as if some musical hold were written there.

Since growing to know the ancestry of words, and being, in consequence, interested in them—for words are cameos carven from precious stones, now lost to acquisition, and with hands slightly skilled in artistry—I have inly resented that prairie was not an Indian word. It should have been, and sounds as if it might have been. But the one thing the Indian came nearer owning than any other, was the prairie. He cast his shadow over that as the hawk did or the buffalo. He and his inseparable pony dashed along it like an arrow. And not to have an Indian name brood over it forever interferes with the logic of poetry. Yet this is justice, after all. Nothing of a roomy fact in America bears an Indian name. Places do. Facts do not. The one thing we had, Europeans did not have, our green sward wide enough to fill in the space from sky to sky, the Indian was too indolent and useless to christen. This big continent (O, the pity of it!) bears an alien name. And our American witchery we may be said to own apart from all this world beside, foreigners must fetch a name for. Indians, you have lost your chance. The Prairies bear an alien name. We have called tarn and mountain and river and lake after you. You did not name them for yourselves. You did not so much as know there was a continent. You had no hunger for discovery. You did not note that the mountains were lofty or the deserts wide. And the prairies you roamed over you coined no word for; and the sea you were afraid of and never touched with arrow or with tomahawk, it being fierce as you and more ruthless, this wears no footprint of yours, nor shall for-

ever. Bronze statue, you have lost your chance beyond recall. Ruskin never knew a prairie. Once he speaks of it slightingly, in a preface, as I recall; but Ruskin never saw a prairie. He railed at what he knew not. Such a reveler as he in gray cathedral wall and tower and in volume of water in swift motion, in bulk of mountain-range standing grim across the sky, in towering passion of the murderous sea—such a reveler, I am confidently persuaded, would have felt the mastery of the prairie had he ever tramped from sky to sky across its quivering chrysoprase. In the preface to the second edition of "Modern Painters" he writes of the Campagna of Rome: "Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on the earth than the solitary extent of the Campagna of Rome under evening light. Let the reader imagine himself for a moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, tread he never so lightly; for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long, knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of moldering earth, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep; scattered blocks of black stone, four-square, remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple, poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruin on whose rents the red light rests like dying fire on defiled altars. The



blue ridge of the Alban mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like countless and shadowy troops of funeral mourners passing from a nation's grave." I can not read a passage like this, one of the noblest descriptive passages in literature, without the assurance that,

UNDER THE STARS

had this seer beheld our prairie, his imagination had capitulated on the instant. I am not unaware that in this description are such things as put Ruskin in the yeast of ecstasy; namely, the prevalence of history—the presence, so to say, of man absent, the stricken might of men, the footprints of departed ingenuities and majesties. Man brooded over that scene. But, for all that, he could have seen and would have seen had his eyes met our vision face to face. Not to love what we do not know is so easy. But for all, whether Ruskin

loved the prairie, is of small consequence to us. We love it. For his sake we wish he might have loved it. These prairies are ours. Europe has mountains tipped with snow and rivers crushed from the glacier's cruel steeps and Arno valleys slipping toward the sea and roll of hill, green, turbulent, and plumed with elms; but Europe has no prairies. They are our own. America wears them thrown across her bosom like a mantle woven by our shuttles, and those shuttles lost. America's unique province is her prairie.

WILD SWEET PEA

And while this phase is fresh in our thought, let us recollect how slightingly American authors have behaved toward the prairie. This is strange, and as humiliating as strange. If any one will take time to read what poet and prose-writer have said on the land of their nativity he will think they had either never known or else had quite forgotten the prairie. Of course, Poe had no word for it. He was poet of woman and lost cities of the sea, arabesques strangely and gorgeously wrought but natureless. He always wandered on the shore of dreams. Lowell nor Longfellow nor Lanier nor Sill nor Bliss Carman nor Emily Dickinson nor Riley nor Cavaness nor Maurice Thompson nor Whittier nor Boker nor Stedman nor Holmes nor Joaquin Miller nor Whitman nor Eugene Ware nor Moulton nor Woodberry nor Imogen Guiney nor Van Dyke have written of the prairie, not once. Ware wrote of a storm on the prairie; but it was of the storm and not of the prairie. The storm might have been anywhere. Once when Whittier mentioned the prairie grass he mismentioned it. If these poets had a word to say, it was in privacy. They spoke of this chiefest beauty of our continent as chancing to think of it while they were discoursing of something besides. What could have ailed them? For one thing, they were mainly seaboard poets. They knew the hills, the streams, the moun-

A ROADSIDE POEM

tains, the sands and marshes of the sea; but prairies were not among their fellowships. They staid too near at home. They did not journey to the West far enough, or else they did not stay long enough to get the prairie wonder in their blood. Riley is Hoosier, and has steeped us in the atmosphere of the beautiful land he knows; but Joaquin Miller knew the glorious prairies, and why did he not know the prairie passion? I wonder at him. Indeed, I wonder at them all who have omitted this lyric from their repertoire. If Lowell, he of the

> "O if you have ever a singing leaf
> I pray you give it me,"—

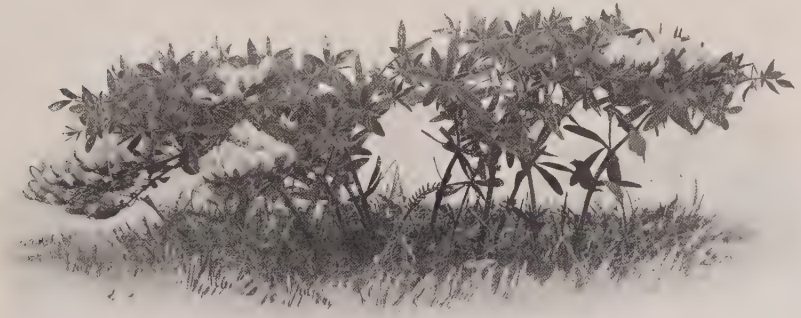
if he had caught the lilt of the singing prairie and the meadow lark,—if! and he did not. Once, just once, once only, Longfellow wandered into the forest primeval, and once he camped with Hiawatha,

> "Heard the whispering of the pine-tree,
> Heard the lapping of the water;

but did not go westward ho, until the prairies widened, till they grew wan against the uttermost sky. Bryant saw the prairie! and talked about it. We must love him for that. But if a body may be bold enough to say his mind, Bryant's "The Prairies" fails all but wholly of getting the prairie atmosphere. Read the poem and see. This failure grows out of the Bryant peculiarity which was that he was not primarily a nature poet but a moralist. The point that tips his arrow is, without exception, a moralism. So of "The Waterfowl." So of "The Fringed Gentian." So of "Green River." So of "Thanatopsis." Now, however valuable moral accentuations may be, they are not always conducive to a glow as of sunrise on the wheat. Some morals may be left unspoken to the end that they may be better spoken. Some lessons may be safely intrusted to inference. Bryant

never did, or, if he did, I do not now recall the occasion. Nothing less needs a moral than a prairie. We need the prairie. We want its atmosphere, fresh with its vagabondage of the winds. Moralizing will burn the prairies up like prairie fires. So although, Stoddard said, "It was worth going to the ends of the world to be able to write 'The Prairies,'" and although the word is true enough, this writer adventures the opinion that the poem of the prairies is yet unwritten. Would that some poet with the wonder of the prairie in his blood would come and pipe as the winds do on summer days across the undulant grasses wild with journeyings, whence we know not, whither we know not, but winds filled with the mystery of space and voyaging, and wonderful as sea winds and as individual.

Nor have prose-writers caught the prairie to their heart. Irving is the best, or shall I say Cooper? Thoreau was a wild man of the woods, not of the prairies. I think he never saw them. The Maine woods and the woods that girt Walden Pond about, the bowlders bulging out into the open, the torn sands on Cape Cod,—these were his acquaintances grown into fast friendships: but prairies—where could this seaside provincial get a glimpse of them? Cooper had a felicitous sense of the outdoors, possibly the most felicitous of all our writers, and has named the concluding volume of Leather Stocking Tales, "The Prairies." So much we will thank him for, although the book is on the prairies and not of them. In "Astoria," Irving has drawn the picture of that rugged, unfretting,



WILD INDIGO

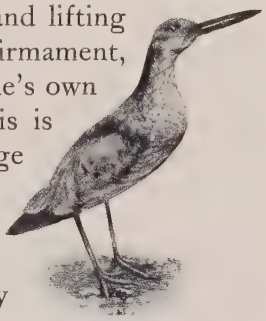
difficulty-surviving, wild, great man, the frontiersman, in such capable fashion that the frontier would know itself in looking at the picture. It is a thing to make weakness ashamed; but in no accurate estimate is the prairie in this sketch. His "Tour of the Prairies" is his accepted effort to breath the prairie breath. But reading this tour we discover there is too little prairie. The tour keeps too close to woods and streams. Too little grass is waving to the wind. Buffaloes are feeding, and the hunter's breath grows hot in racing this prodigious beast to the grave; but prairies illimitably wide, illimitably wonderful, an Addisonian Irving scarcely drank into his blood. But he rode toward and on the edge of this most American thing, and felt its loneliness. So near did he approach its heart. But that he should have cared to tour them, should have felt his leisure not invaded by this prairie voyaging, is all to his praise. He smelled the prairie wind under the stars, and felt it doff past him like a wistful wing. Therefore we praise and love Washington Irving, and laud him as chief realizer of the prairies amongst American litterateurs. But have any of these prose-writers or poets had heart-to-heart talks with the prairies? I profess to believe they have not. I would not underrate them, surely not. I would not expect too much; but I would expect enough. If only they had staid on the prairie long enough! This is their omission. You must not be in the prairie; but the prairie must be in you. That alone will do as qualification for biog-

IN A PRAIRIE RAVINE

BLUE STEM

rapher of the prairies. As Tennyson first had Ulysses and his sea, drunk like quaffing wine, and then began his trumpeting until you saw gray Ulysses and his mariners and saw the dim lights on receding rocks and heard the deep moan round with many voices and felt the mystery of this man and sea, so he who tells the prairie mystery must wear the prairie in his heart. May such a one hasten his coming!

I own a square mile of prairie. Or possibly this may be stronger language than the facts justify. I leave the reader to judge. I have given my autograph for a square mile of prairie. This method of purchase appeals to my imagination. I dwell fondly upon it. The customary way of buying ground is to pay cash for it. This seems to me crude and plebeian. Anybody can buy for cash. There is nothing creditable to character in that class of transaction. Anybody with a dollar in hand can buy a dollar's worth of commodities. But when for a solemn mile of prairie, a four-square block of God's out-of-doors, with the height of the sky above it and the depth of the world beneath it, and the radiancy of dawns and sunsets shed over it, and the dim dawn of dusks enfolding it like a blessed compassion,—a mile east, a mile west, a mile south, a mile north,—and all the time to be tramping on your own grass and breathing air brewed on your own ground and lifting head into your own sky and gazing at your own firmament, bless me this *is* plutocracy! And then to take one's own hand in congratulation, remembering that all this is held in fee simple without the cost of a postage stamp, simply by the execution of an autograph, —why, this method of purchase is as unique as the prairie itself. When I light upon a wight who boasts that he has paid cash for his ranch, I pity him; that is how I feel. This is so commonplace, you know. But to have exchanged a dashing movement of a body's right hand for a section of land, there is something to that. This is no gross transaction. This is



PRAIRIE PLOVER

BLAZING STAR

commerce put on a high plane. I am told by persons considering themselves sagacious in business that this giving an autograph for land is a temporary expedient—that sooner or later (they suggest sooner) I will be required to redeem my handwriting. For myself, I think little of this kind of talk. It smacks of commercialism; and I oppose commercialism. I have seen no sign of being called upon to pay cash to get my autograph back. And, besides, why do I want my autograph back? No, I am not grasping and will never ask for this precious handwriting. Is not an author's autograph valuable? Even so. But the person holding mine may keep it; and I will keep his land. He will have a good and great man's signature; and the good and great man will have his land. No, I will not collect the autograph; and I can not believe that he will collect the cash off of me. How can he? That has been tried heretofore but with no distinct success. The sages have recited how, after much experiment by experts, it has been definitely conceded that blood can not be extracted from turnips: and this ends this childish talk of collecting money from me. In a purely metaphorical sense I am a turnip; and no extractor thus far invented can secure my blood. By no means. This talk comes, as I think, from the uninitiated. Governments are run on a credit basis; and to all intents and purposes I am a government, but not home rule. Besides, this autograph has been given to my wife's relations. Aye, be it said with modesty, but this was a stroke of genius. I have given this autograph to her folks. Can it be thought that they would disturb the felicity of a christian family, said christian family being related to them by marriage? I think that such a suggestion is ridiculous. When an autograph is issued to said relations by me, it is with the (tacit) understanding that

this ends the transaction, at least as far as I am concerned. I will not tamper with the autograph further, having executed it; and I drop this wise word in passing, let the autograph not tamper with me. After having secured a block of prairie on this unique plan, I can commend the plan. It has novelty and is refreshing. Everything about the place with this original method of purchase breathes of originality. The wind is not more free than this ranch and I. I incline to the belief that John Law, of commercial memory, and I are relations. Our financial methods breathe a spirit of freedom from commercial trammels and precedent which is certainly refreshing. No mortgage is on this ranch, nor does any cash weigh it down. There is a gentleman's autograph on it; and this enhances materially the value of this mile of prairie.

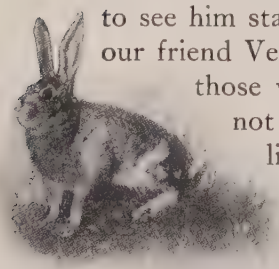
But to stand about the center of this section of prairie and to look and breathe! I think that if I did this often I would sprout wings. I know I could crow; and I would not put it past me to cackle. But it is exhilarant to own your own prairie grass and prairie air; and to tramp on one and in the other—this is kingly. On glorious nights of gloomy dusk—without a silvery moon, but vigiled by the stars—to watch the Pleiades blink, and to feel the wind stream from far and hidden spaces past me as it hails from beyond the confines of the world, blown over infinite spaces of nameless seas and from the mountain land of those dim stars and to feel the wondering eyes of those stars, homes of these winds, searching my face on this tranced night,—this is delight keen as wine, rapturous like love. O, this square mile of prairie is an intoxicant to the soul!

THE PRAIRIE'S WINGS

The prairie-hawk is the brown prairie arrow. The Indian arrows are all broken or lost or archaic, mere curling of blue smoke to tell that once a camp-fire burnt here. And the one arrow left to cleave swift way over the

prairie and through the sky is the prairie-hawk. And his is the speed vagrant, but terrific, which should embody the spirit of the prairie when set to aggressive winged motion. His flight has the notionateness of prairie winds, and the sudden detour as of a change of mind, a leap straight on, and then a notionate, abrupt change in direction, as if he had just bought wings and were out trying what sort of wings they were. I have seen him lurch along a bleak winter's russet landscape as if he were joking with it, in patches of torn flight, utterly erratic and utterly engaging. The freedom of the fields, the prairie-fields, is on him. His flight is, in ordinary, low. He loves his prairies and would keep close against their breast. They mother him. In their tussocks of green his nest was builded and in them, in turn, he builded nest for his babes. The prairie and the sky shall be his affiliations; and across this prairie will he, in his spasmodic piloting, voyage as across a sea.

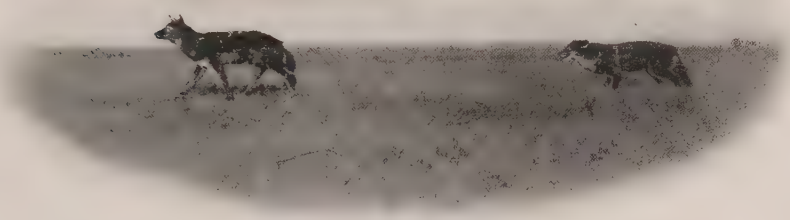
The jack-rabbit—him we will not forget seeing the prairie can not forget him nor he the prairie. Thither he hastes; this he loves; and to see him lying flat in the brown grasses, long ears forgetful of alert erectness, falling along his shoulders as if the wind had blown them so, and to see him standing alert, listening ("aures erecti" as says our friend Vergil), ready for a leap; then to see him give those wild prairie bounds, as if spurred forward, not by fear, but by delight of the long, brown-like sea roads, ready for fleet running; and his racing is as if the tumble-weed made bounds, lurching to the jest of fleet prairie winds. His going is spasmodic like the blowing of prairie winds. He could not wear a pedometer. He is prairie-begotten and is as lithe as a lynx, and as eager as a gust of March wind blowing Spring back to the world. He is the voiceless swiftness of the prairie.



THE JACK-RABBIT

The prairie-wolf, his name inclines me to him. He, too, is a lover of the prairie. Wolf he is, sullen and whelpish. His

swinging gallop, with head thrown back waggishly over his shoulder, is free as the blowing of winter winds. His lair is the prairie-paved sky. He is not moral. He cares for no works on ethics. He looks out for No. 1, in which lucrative employment both on and off the prairie, many are engaged. He is ministerially inclined in his love for chicken, though I truly hope the ministers are more religious in their method of acquiring their favorite edible. But the wolf is no moralist, only a committee of ways and means to get what himself wants, which he does with a precision most discouraging to raisers of chickens, though I have sometimes found myself envying him while always reprobating his methods. He is



PRAIRIE WOLVES

true socialist, and devoutly believes in making himself free with other people's belongings, and like a true socialist too, he has not been known to share his plunder with any other hungry citizen of the grassy plains. Many is the night when I have lain awake listening to the eery barking of the prairie wolf. At the first it is weird. I may have only been dreaming; but that cry appeals to me as the expression of the weirdness of the prairies, their strange unknowableness. This wolf bark is like the laughter of a child maniac, repetitional, meaningless, remorseless, a laughter without joy in or behind it. The cry is a wandering voice of the prairie levels: disappearing and reappearing among the billows of a rolling prairie, but is mirthless, insistent,

uncanny. Through the still hours of nights, quiet as the quiet stars, I have heard this invasion of unbridled wild voices mixing unmusical screeches in sullen, joyless chorus; they were the prairie's stretches breaking into a vagabond song, a meaningless bacchanalian revel. The voices lifted, quieted, and strengthened, as the wolf packs galloped here and there at play. Voices without a touch of playfulness, but spontaneous they were; and the prairies were calling under the skies of night implacable, inexplicable, and weird. The wolf is careless of any man; and his lope, than which nothing could be less routine or more care-free, less stilted, less an acquisition, or more an extemporaneous procedure,—is the heedlessness of the prairies, the needlessness of wings, the playing with the ground as if it were a jest, with waggish head thrown over the shoulder as to insult your laggard speed. The wolf-leap is the prairie in cruel motion, not creeping like feline hypocrisy, but the vagabond swing of a wild, elastic delight in the unfenced wonder of the prairie. The wolf is a prairie child.

And the prairie-chicken is child of the sullen winter grasses—dappled brown like a winter prairie field, so that when this wild thing lies close along the grass, an expert eye might forgive itself for not beholding it, until the wild thing leaps from its neighborly wild grasses and whirs away, brown-blown rags against a gray sky, and is as if the brown prairie had found wings. I have watched this singularity of flight; have seen the companies crowded in great multitudes or only a few survivors of what had once been great flocks; and their movement is like the free moods of far prairie winds' lurches of flight across the sky in a moment. A blur of wings—a brown battle rush and wildness that knows not man nor his peace measures—and they are gone. And the flavor of the prairie-chicken's flesh is as wild as its prairie flight. Its tang is caught from the wayward prairies, a wild flavor as strange as bison flesh, the prairie become sapid. When winter clouds lower and the

brown prairies swirl to the anger of the sullen prairie winds, to see and hear the flutter and wings of a flock of prairie-chickens is to have brown prairies slip the leash of the earth and take to the sky.

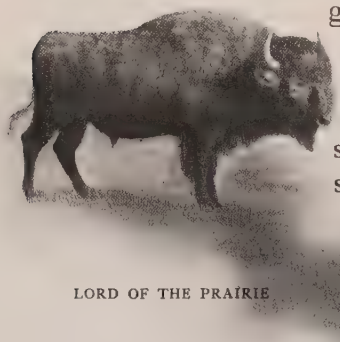
THE PRAIRIE-CHICKEN

And the buffalo,—who shall write his epitaph or rehearse his story? He is beast of the prairie. To see that burly figure, that huge bronzed head protruding from prairie or picture or cast in bronze, is to make a certificate of America. The buffalo belongs here. He is the might of the prairie; and like the prairie he is vanishing. I like not to think of the pathos of his evanishment, as I like not to think of the sadness of disappearing grasses dying out for lack of room, and from invasion of the grasses of civilization; but to read in Irving or Inman or Greeley or Richardson, or any other, of those vast herds of trampling bronzed beasts, with heads bent low, their prodding horns stooped for battle, their massed legions, their prodigious onset, their trampling as if the thunder had dropped from the sky and had begun to trample on the solid world, the trembling ground, fairly oscillant to the hammering hoofs,—these are the native rough-riders of the prairie: these are the children of angered prairies, fleet of foot, furious of onward going, ruthless as death, grim as fate, a hot breath as of the spirit of the wild prairie. The prairie a-foot and angered and battle mooded—this is the buffalo. For the buffalo was a sullen, laughterless, frigid occupant of the horizon, as stationed there by the prairie to keep intruders out. Than a buffalo, strong, stocky, immobile, truculent as an Indian warrior on the warpath, head drooped as to institute a charge on any trespasser, silhouetted against the sky-lines; than this buffalo, I know not anything more expressive of America. And he is a prairie figure. The woods he courted not; but the long, green-gray, brown, or green grass-grown, wind-swept and

PRAIRIE-WARD

wind-billowed prairie-stretches set against the turquoise hedges of remote skies, these he loved,—there he flourished and rejoiced. The buffalo is the monstrous prairie become perambulant, the interior of a continent heaving into prodigious and portentous battle charge.

The prairie expresses itself in bronze. In no other material does it care to be sculptured. Indian, wolf, prairie-dog, prairie-chicken, prairie-hawk, are all lighter or darker bronze. 'T is a sullen metal, but heroic. I have a face of Grant done on a metal of bronze; and the silent, mysterious soldier seems meant for such vehicle of interpretation. The prairie folk love the grim, irradiant pigments of winter grasses. All the colors of its bird, beast, or man are variegations of the sullen autumnal or winter grasses; and the buffalo's grim sentineling along the prairie's sky and an Indian's bronze face looking stern as winter seas, are made so by the glowing on them of a Winter's prairie, which no delightful Spring can ever kiss into emerald and flowers. And buffalo and Indian must forever hang around the brown horizons of the disappeared prairies, which used to wander out to catch, with brown, burnt hand, the trailing garment of the sunset and the storm.

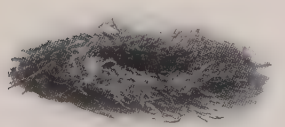


LORD OF THE PRAIRIE

And the meadow-lark! I have a quarrel with whoever named him. He is ill-named; and that is unfair dealing with man or bird. This jaunty bird is not meadow-lark; he is prairie-lark. A meadow is civilized; and the lark is not civilized. Meadows with tame grass grow too eagerly, and mature too precociously, for this bird of the dappled yellow breast to nest his young and get them ready for their lifelong voyage across the fields. Blue grass, clover, alfalfa, timothy are all unfitted for this prairie-nester. But prairie grasses, to which this sweet bird is native, grow slowly enough to allow all gentle larks to be graduated from

their nests or ever a sickle clatters across the hay-field. The prairie-lark! Now that is delicious. Now I know why his garments are mottled like the hawk's and the prairie-chicken's; now I know why his breast is yellow. 'T is watching for the dawn so long as to have caught and held the earliest yellow rays of Summer on his breast when morning spilled its light through twenty million dewdrops on his heart. Now I know why his voice is haunting, and why it haunts me so. It is the laughter of the prairie. It is the prairie gladness lifted to a song. Henry Van Dyke, in his poem "The Veery," has this home touch of saying how he heard, in foreign lands, the nightingale, the lavrock, and the blackbird; but when he heard each in his native day or night, himself was home-sick for the veery. I like him for that mood, but, by his courtesy, will retain my preference for the prairie-lark. No song pleases me like his. No laughter, save a woman's or a babe's, is quite so sweet. The whip-poor-will, with his sad fluting, is a minor poet and musician (dear as he is unto my heart) to the prairie-lark. Him I listen for on the brown pre-springtime prairies. Spring is come to me when I hear that willowy melody flute out and spill along the prairie waiting for the dawn of Spring. The lark's flight is like the blowing of a sudden gust of prairie wind. A whir of wings like a quail's, a furious fanning as if it were meant to encounter the fury of the gale, and then as sudden a cessation from this violent mood; the spread of wings horizontally, the shooting of a yellow breast straight as an arrow from an ardent string, then a staying of his springy flight, a fluttering of wings, a veering downward eagerly; for his prairie, *my* prairie, beckons him,—and he alights jauntily upon a weed-top, lights and swings; and the prairie laughter bubbles from his heart; and the green prairie has laughed into a song. I have never seen a

THE PRAIRIE-LARK



THE PRAIRIE-LARK'S NEST

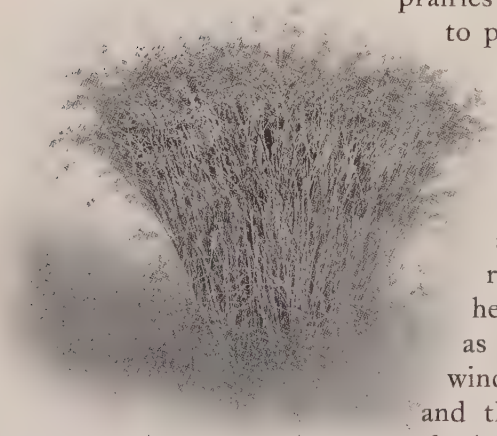
lark leap high, even in his first sudden lunges of flight. He feels the gravitation of the prairie tugging at his wings and heart. He loves the nearness of his love; and his home is prairie, and not sky. Skylarks glimpse the limitless blue; and the prairie-lark glories in the limitless level prairies. His heart warms toward the stretch of field and glows through his breast until you see the warm radiance. When, as his habit is, the lark preens himself on a fence-post with many a flick of form and feather and sudden turning of the head as to see all comers to hear his roundelay,—when this minstrel trills a tune, a fence-post is become a poet. Last Spring, in days of April advent, I spent a day upon the prairie quite alone of men. The sun woke into warmth. The whole landscape smiled to welcome him. The grass crumpled beneath my feet as I ran in sheer excess of gladness to feel the prairie spring beneath me. And the larks were courting! Say, friend, have you ever gone amongst the courting larks? If not, you have missed much. I commend you to it. Courting is always gladness such as helps a right heart to the gladness of the world. They who love not courting are dull-hearted and dull-brained. They do not know the meaning of the heart. But courting larks—what a gala-day it is to them, as to us all! A courting day! Who does not call to mind the beauty and the joy of that happy day in his own life? And this day on the brown prairie when the sun was telling he would presently bring the Spring, the prairie-larks were intent on love; and love makes poets, as all the world has noticed. And every Mr. Lark was paying court to some Miss Lark; and the sky was saturated with their song. How the rivals set their love to song! How the air thrilled! How the lovers raced wing-races to and fro, and sang, and sang, and sang! For miles the sky seemed seized with singing. The air was balmy and quiet; and sounds traveled easily and far. The lark's songs for miles seemed to make their chansons for my hearing. 'T was a

day of revels. I have not forgotten nor can forget the day; and my one sadness is that no telling can re-create the melodious ecstasy of that sunlit prairie where the larks were chief musicians. This Fall I had made a long drive in the night, alone. A fierce drench of rain had forced my horses under shelter, where they ate from a haymow, and I slept on it. My fun was greater than theirs. Rain drenched down, pounded upon the barn-roof as with angry fists then as morning drew on apace, allayed its fierceness then ceased altogether; and in the pearl-gray morning the nags and I resumed our way across the prairie. The golden-rods had quenched their fires: the asters were wide-eyed and glorious: the sunflowers were bankrupt in glow: the walnut-trees had dropped almost every leaf but were holding fast every spicy nut: the elms were growing rusty: the ivies were spurts of red flame; and in the dawning light, larks in glorious companies were racing along the prairie with their quick spurts of flight, their pausings to consider whether they would go or stay; and in the Fall, at morning dawn, I heard such discoursing of sweet melody, such lark-bursts of song, as I had not heard in all my life before. Larks sing in springtime, and as summer sweats toward grape-reaping, cease almost or altogether, till, when Autumn comes, these singers are dumb. I wonder at them. Could I sing so blithely and so heartenningly as they, my voice should never be mute. I would sing while daylight lasted for the gladdening of the world. But they do as they please, and please not to sing when springtime dies. But here, on the gray Autumn morning, they sang as if to break the heart of song. I had driven fifty miles through mud and midnight downpour of the skies; but when the prairie-

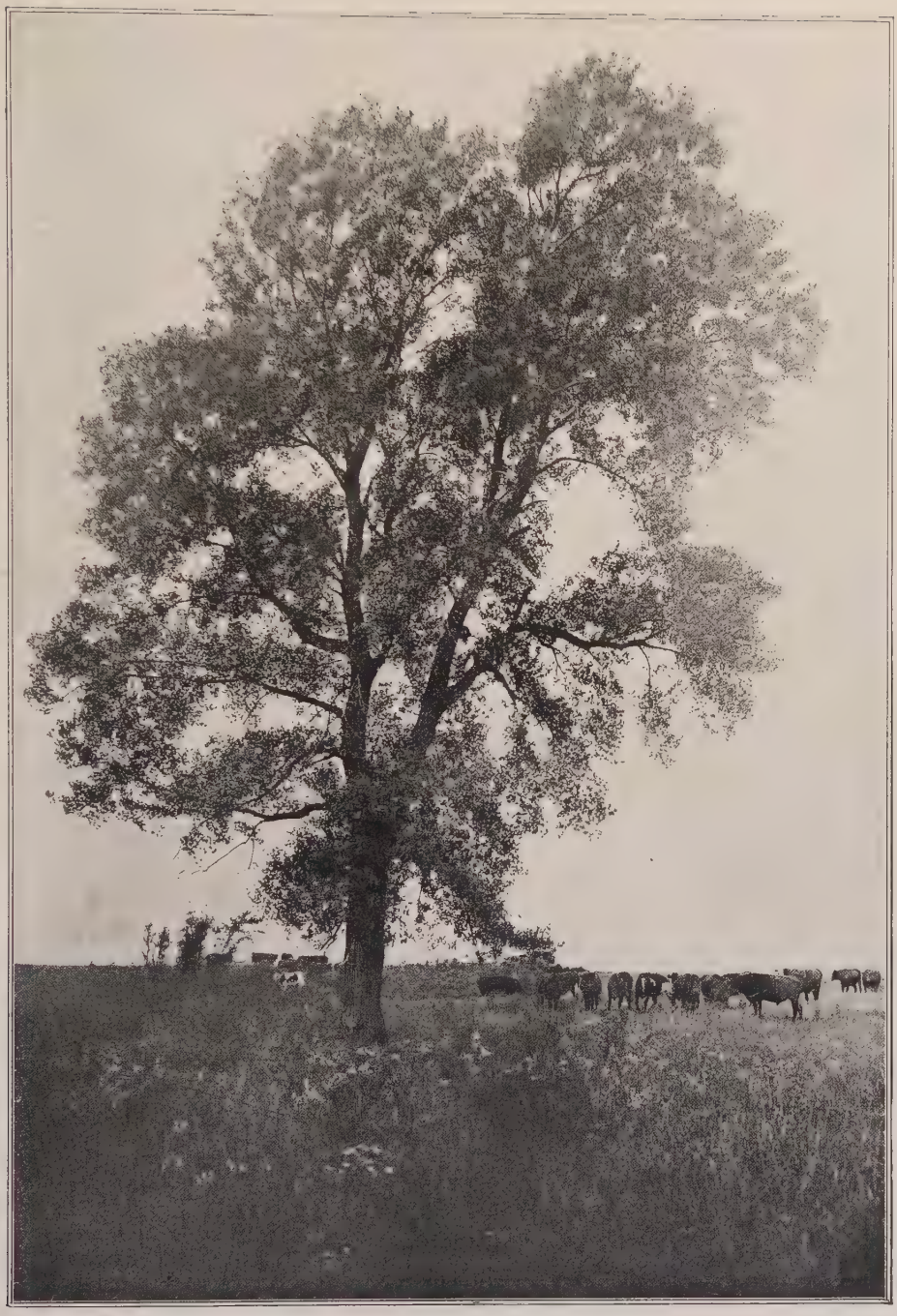
COMPASS PLANT

larks set a-caroling in the Fall, my heart was revisited of Spring. Prairie-lark, with your coat of prairie brown and with your breast yellow as the beach-leaf in autumn glory, I would your voice were reproducible by any trick of words or music-notes. Sweet unspeakably and wild, your liquid melody is the prairie's interpretation of the sky. Prairie-lark, you are my bonnie minstrel. I hear you now, your voice half prairie and half sky, but altogether lovely; I hear you now, and I shall hear you always!

All the prairie has are grass and flowers. Trees belong not to the prairies. Is that strange? How strange? Shrubs belong not to the prairies, save here and there a clump of sumacs cluster like sheep about a gentle shepherd. How often, when a child, a child of the prairie, have I gone out barefoot and alone to go wild-strawberrying upon the prairies! Nobody told me I was going to poetry or picking poetry. Maybe nobody knew. I did not then, though I do now. But out on the lifting prairie hills, free, free, free, with the prairie wind blowing full in my face and pushing me rudely as to get rid of my intrusion, though I heeded not, thinking it was jesting, as indeed it was; but the prairie wind piped with its prairie orchestra and the sky gave the prairies room; and the clouds fled from the winds affrighted, and the straying breeze came in sudden gusts with lulls of quiet; and the grass answered to each touching of the wind more mobile than a sea-wave, and would at a gust bend low as to let the wind, so evidently in a hurry, get past. And the curlew's call; and the prairie-lark—that is his name, I will call him that—lit, like a winged song, in the green pools of grass

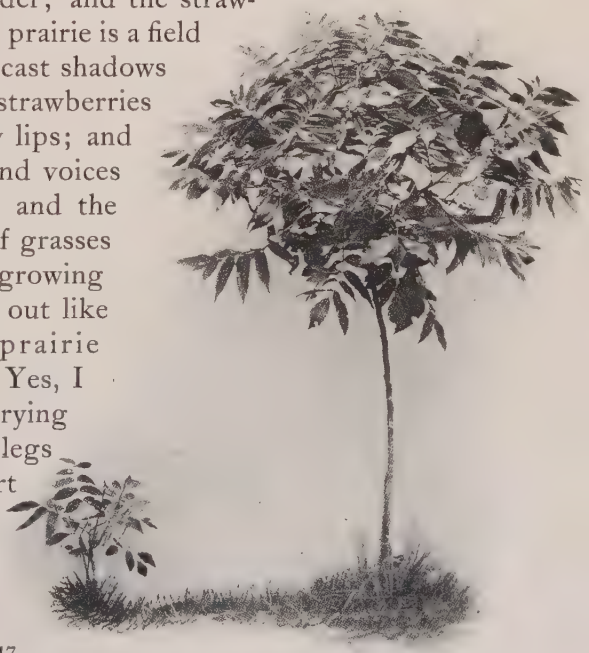


THE SPRAY OF A PRAIRIE FOUNTAIN



THE COTTONWOOD, A LOVER OF PRAIRIE STREAMS

and gave his lyric to the wind as a love-token; and I, the little lad with bare feet and freckled hands and freckled face and holding tight to the tin berry-pail and with wild sense of wideness and of freedom—albeit as a child all undefined; for children define nothing. They are too busy living. Definitions come when we have gotten into the back bays of life. I called to the winds and tried to answer the prairie-lark, and could not, seeing he has monopoly of his own singing, and will not lend his lute even to a freckled boy out wild-strawberrying,—and called aloud, not knowing why I called, and danced with the wild bee and waded knee-deep (a small boy's knee-deep) in prairie grasses, and felt the quiver of the green grass-blades about my ankles and naked knees, and ran or puttered, as my mood turned, toward a group of sumacs, if I could see one, across the quivering plain, and was rarely disappointed in finding wild strawberries in their shadow. And the sumac thickets on the prairies are plowed under; and the strawberry beds are lost; and the prairie is a field of corn; but those sumacs cast shadows in my heart; and the wild strawberries crimson my fingers and my lips; and the tang of those winds and voices when I was a boy is on me; and the lark flirts from the bunch of grasses where his little folks are growing wings, and tosses his song out like a rollicking voice of the prairie winds,—and where am I? Yes, I know now,—I am strawberrying out in the prairies with bare legs and freckled face, and girt round by miles of unfenced prairie and thousands of miles of prairie winds and an ecstasy of wideness.



WHERE WILD STRAWBERRIES GROW

And to look at a sky-full of prairie, and never a tree or bush on all of it, unless a palmy clump of sumacs camped there! How shall we explain this? We can not. Some things are to be named as a child is. Nobody knows why prairies are treeless and shrubless. That is one of the prairie mysteries. When planted here, trees and shrubs grow and prosper. There are no hostilities of soil or breath; but they did not grow there of themselves. That is all. Grass owned the prairie. How often I have let my eyes drift like a cloud across long miles of prairie, and not a sight of any shrub from sky to sky! The wild grass had its way. A clump of wild weeds, clouds of wild flowers, but not a bush in sight; for so is the prairie sacred to the grass. And with wide stretching prairies the eye grows a glutton. It knows not the meaning of enough. I have, many 's the day, swept swiftly across prairies fifty miles an hour, watching every inch of the journey, loving every inch of the journey, drinking it in as the thirsty earth does dew but never having sufficiency, not to say satiety. I become exhilarant. I become bacchanal. The wideness, the delight, the freedom fairly inebriate the spirit. The air is fresh and keen: the wind scurries like Indian riders: the grasses lean down to kiss the earth, who is their mother, and lift again to catch the wind's caress, and answer to it in fitful allegiancy; then race madly like a thing gone mad; then in a moment, without visible provocation, quiet, till the calm is like the calm of the high heavens between dim stars. Who will articulate, for those who know it not or feel it not, this drench of delight, this rapture of living?

THE CURLEW'S CALL

And prairies are so free. In Cæsar's Commentaries, I recall the terse Roman, heartless, Cæsaric phrase, "Dux missus ad Roman," that free, wild chief, I feel his freedom yet, and feel him gnawing out his heart in Roman slavery with galling gladiatorship, with an Italian army of slaves.

And the prairie has like sense of unquenchable freedom. That old Helvetian chief died free in spirit. When on the prairie you become son of the landscape, and of the prairie landscape, far as the sky, which is as the hawk and as the unallegianced winds. I do not wonder that the old prairie rangers sneered at towns and houses, and were choked with their shut-in-ness. To have slept the night under the skies while prairie night-winds slipped past on tiptoe as fearing to wake you; when the dews were lighting their lamps on every grass-blade for the pageant of the morning; when the prairie-wolf flung his hoidenish voice out in the quiet sky, while the smells of prairie and sky were so delicious as to render Arabian perfumes garish things; with the solemn sky exalted over you, with your prairie bed stretching from sky to sky and quite big enough to stretch on—well, than this no bed-room is nobler, nor is any so noble. To lie and drift to dreams slowly, like a receding night-bird's voice, into the prairie and the sky of sleep;—and the prairie has had its way.

The prairie is the sea of the land. The ancestors of this hand that writes were sea-born and seafaring folks for nameless generations; and this son of theirs never saw the sea until he was man full grown. He heard that somber minstrelsy only in his dreams by dark and day, but was reared mid-prairie and has found that, as a fact in his spiritual biography, the prairie took with him the place of the ancestral sea. Prairie and sea plant no other hedgerows than the sky. Both billow out into the universe. This is a great, strange presence,—this intimation of the infinite, this feeling that your journey

leads you into space, that if your feet would walk to the horizon verge they would thereafter journey out into the sky. My opinion holds that this feeling is more visible in prairies than seas, the reason being, probably, that sea and sky are both amethyst, and sea melts into sky. They seem not two but one. All appears terraqua; but with the prairie, its chrysoprase is strikingly, beautifully, and I will add gloriously, contrasted with the sky amethyst, so that here are two lands apparent on which the path is set. The prairie path leads to the sky path; the paths are one: the continents are two; and you make your journey from the prairies to the sky. You tramp across the chrysophrase into the amethyst. O journey from the near into the far, O journey from the swaying green into the becalmed, illimitable blue, O journey from the earth with prairie-wind a-blowing in the face into the far, dim spaces level as the seashore, where, by imperceptible tilt of landscape, I am led at last up to the purple hilltops of eternity, where blow unhindered and forever the winds of God,—O journey, journey!

The spacious prairie is helper to a spacious life. Mountains shut us in; prairies let us out. Mountains are barrier builders; prairies are barrier destroyers. Prairies make level roadways for the soul to walk, and invite outward, outward to the sky, which invitation is passionate and eloquent beyond describing. Prairies lead into the sky! Had you learned that, my heart? They aid to grow a roomy life. Big thoughts are nurtured here, with little friction. The world does not seem great, but is great. Goals seem suggestions and not destinations. Room, room! On the prairies you may stand tiptoe and your uplifted finger-tips have no fear that they will touch the sky, and you may have and feel no lack of room. "No hindrance" would appear a legitimate motto for the stately prairies; and the motto is sublime.

Who writes about the grass with all the poetry of it?

No one has expressed that poetry. Ruskin has approximated being its voice more adequately than anybody else; but I think the prairies will die without grass finding a voice. Its democracy may be against it. John J. Ingalls celebrated blue grass; but blue grass is civilized. Prairie grass is barbarian. One has been taken to school: the other knows not the meaning of a schoolhouse door. The one is conventional: the other is free as birds. The one belongs to dooryards and pastures: the other to the spaces where winds are grown and storms begin. One is reproducible: the other, uprooted, dies. This is the pathos of the prairie, that, once turned over by the plow, prairie grasses die. Some other vegetation grows on the sod where prairie was. Grass does not. Prairie grass plowed up is eliminated. It grows but once. I have a plot of prairie kept to prairie for prairie's sake; and no one can dig a plowshare into that sod. Sacred it shall remain to prairie grass. If you uproot a pine you can plant another, or cut down an oak you can plant an acorn, and so of fruit or flower. Violets have seeds. Prairie grasses have only roots, so that, when once the prairie grasses die, no cunning art known to the husbandman can ever coax their radiant greens into life again. Was I not right? Is not this the pathos of the prairies? They die out like the buffalo. Where civilization digs deep with its spade, forests readily rise to reassert lost ascendency. It is heartening to see how forests are growing with black tangle of shadows and boscage, where the wood quiet lasts the Summer through, choking with indolent odors. But prairies have no art of resurrection. They, like the brokenhearted, have no to-morrow. And if prairie grasses cling

BROWN-EYED SUSANS

with a tenacious persistence along the field edges, lay this disposition not to obstinacy but to love of life. 'T is the wild grasses' last chance. Sunflowers can seed themselves across a landscape, but prairie grasses can only creep inches where roots in the dark soil reach out. A voice calling for help, "Let not the prairie grasses die. Keep a plot for memory, for nature." Green, vivid prairie for remembrance! Remembrance of the morning of the world! And to me alfalfa, millet, timothy, white clover, red clover, I love them, and faithfully, but all appeal in lesser passion than the prairie grass. They belong to to-day: this, to yesterday. They are the here: these, the there. They can not live without civilization: these can not well live with it. Day was when the land was theirs alone. Besides, prairie grass is so beautiful. Blue grass (and I do not offend it) is demure; but prairie grass is vivid, as if God had just dyed it. Essential surprise is on its face, the wide wonder of a face just waking in the dewy morn. Prairie grass never seems to know anybody. It forgets faces, or, what I suppose is more accurate, does not recognize them. The prairies belong to the sky, and do not, in their nomad vocabulary, know the meaning of a face. They creep where their king is; they journey toward the sky.

I can no more get enough of a wide prairie than I can of a sunrise. I can sit for months of days watching the level stretches and never feel a sense of enoughness, not to say satiety. I know no limit. Owning the landscape, that is the prairie. March, march, march, what is on the march? Why, silly friend, the grass is on the march.

Or when the prairies do not run toward the sky, but tumble toward it, this is a phase of beauty prairies indulge in. If prairie grasses do not billow like the blue sea does, lift continents of water in one glorious leap skyward; if prairies are not mobile, they have their own methods of turbulence. They lift themselves in long

swells like rollers of the oceans, long undulance, lifting, falling, trough and crest, and fill a sky full of their billows, these billows which keep their fixidity of undulance. Thus is the prairie grown billowy. The long waves lift and toss green spray from green crests. Can the eye light on a scene more imposing than this, billows lifted and stationary? How I have reveled in a landscape of this sea-wave made constant! Billows and billows far as the eye can see, swell on swell, a leap and a tossing, a refusal to abate, a delight in upleap, a delight so thrilling that in its skyward approach it tarries as saying, "I can not fall, having risen toward thee, O sky! I love thy dome, O sky, and must abide a-near thy smile. Bid me not to leave thee, O sky, my sky!" In this toss of the prairie is a sense of rapture and wonder akin to praise, which can find no descriptive term. Lexicons can give us no word equal to the occasion and the mood. How I have watched, standing on the green billows' last acclivity until I have seemed to feel the undulations as of a watery wave. Thus is the freedom of the billowy sea transported to the solid earth. I would not say this waving prairie was more impressive than the level prairie walking toward the waiting sky but would say that it is a type of impressiveness, a radiant expression of nature's vitality and versatility, a sea-wave of emerald sown to multi-colored flowers, treeless, shrubless, but aflame with green gladness of floral colors, pinks, blues, yellows, and whites; God's sea in flower; and the waves at rest lest they should tilt this radiancy of flowers!

And was there not some fine poetic insight in the early day naming the mover's wagon the "prairie schooner?" When across this wide, undulant prairie, the white wagon-top went climbing wave on wave, and sinking out of sight in the hollows of innumerable ravines, only to reappear again afar off on leaning green billow,—was this not the visible importing of the ocean's white sail into the land?—

And when, across long doldrums of level green, the schooners slowly vanished as if caught, not by the currents of the air but by a current of the sea,—white sail on green and sleepy wave,—here, too, was the poetry of voyaging. When a little babe and held against a mother's gentle breast, this writer voyaged across the prairies from Fort Leavenworth to the Rockies. And what a voyage that must have been! Though he, a babe, had no knowledge of the strange witchery of his journey, to sail across a prairie-level sea, with a mother's arms for a hammock, and a mother's bosom for a pillow, and a mother's singing for a sea lullaby,—that was a voyage to make all sea-goings uninteresting as a twice-told tale. But he, poor little lad, knew naught of this divine poetry, but across the long green levels steadily sailed,—tossed on the stranded billows, this prairie schooner sailed. Instead of tritons to blow the sail, there were oxen to pull it. But this was a brave voyage. The crew were my father and my mother; and I, the little tyke, was sole passenger. And afterward, when I was but a little lad, only old enough to remember a very, very little, I sailed back across these identical prairies; only now, I sailed motherless; and the crew was my father, I still being sole passenger. No arms nor breast nor lily wonder of a mother's face, nor star-shining of a mother's eyes, nor the whole world of tenderness of a mother's hugging arms, but the bearded sea-going man, crew of the prairie schooner, and the little passenger; and though a little chap, the lad, now grown, can recall the prairie levels and the warlike Indians seen at distances, fierce to his childish imagination, riding like wicked winds along the prairie ranges; for those were the days when the Indian was not a man of peace, but when schooners were wont to sail in fleets for self-protection, and when the crew slept or sailed with trusty loaded rifle in the hand. And now, I can see those barbaric riders sweep along the levels on their fleet Indian ponies and can feel the wild thrill in the night

at hearing some alarm. And the voyaging—nothing besides the crew and passenger—and sailing on steadily with the merest dalliance of motion; and camping at night and noon and we cooked our supper and breakfast with a fire of buffalo chips; and the lad would fall asleep watching his father attending the beasts, and would find himself sleeping in the night under the schooner cover, and would look out and find the stars shining far but brilliant in the prairie sky, and would waken his father to ask if all were well, and if God were there, and where was mother, mother?—and being told by the father, whose voice, as he now recalls, choked at the saying, that God was here, and mother was out past and beyond the stars; and she was with God there, as God was with us here; but she was watching her little lad;—then the lonely little lad would sob a little, and fall asleep on his father's heart! He recollects! And now the father and mother are both with God there; and their lad is with God here. But the voyaging across the prairie in the white prairie schooner was the invasion of his soul by the prairie, and has staid with him through years, and will stay with him all the years that are to come. He is, by all pre-emption, a son of the prairies.

Irving made mention of the loneliness of the prairies. He is quite right. They are lonely, with a loneliness for which tears are no alleviation. Whittier, with an inaccuracy born of ignorance, talks of the prairie moaning like a

PRAIRIE SCHOONER

broken heart. This is far away from truth; sea-waves moan: prairies never moan. By no license of interpretation can you so construe them. Prairie grasses swish. In that sound heard at night is something weird as a dead man seen alone by moonlight. I have lain all night long, many 's the night, listening to the weird voices of the grass, —I know nothing comparable with it. No fields of oats, wheat, or corn can be mentioned with it. Corn rustles; grass swishes; winter grass heard by dark, when the winds brew tempests, will put your spirit in frame for believing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and the poems of Edgar Allan Poe. Loneliness, wide as a sky, will grip your spirit. A moan will lurch from your lips. You will feel the tragedy of space. The being shut out in a universe alone, forsaken, solitary, in the unpathed spaces where no stars light their lamps nor any angels ever happen by nor any guidance is afforded and where a compass would be a terrestrial bauble because its needle would find no pole star,—such loneliness will drench you, as I have been drenched with the falling waves of ragged seas. The swish of the grass, the long reaching of the darkness, spaces laying hold on you like an iron hand, spaces speaking to you in a husky whisper, fearful as battle, frightful as death! The lonely prairies, with the rush of the tireless wind and the swish of the tawny grasses and the last touch of loneliness, the "kye-yi" of the prairie-wolf tossing his wild cry for the winds to carry where they will,—loneliness, thy other name, thy one true synonym, is prairie.

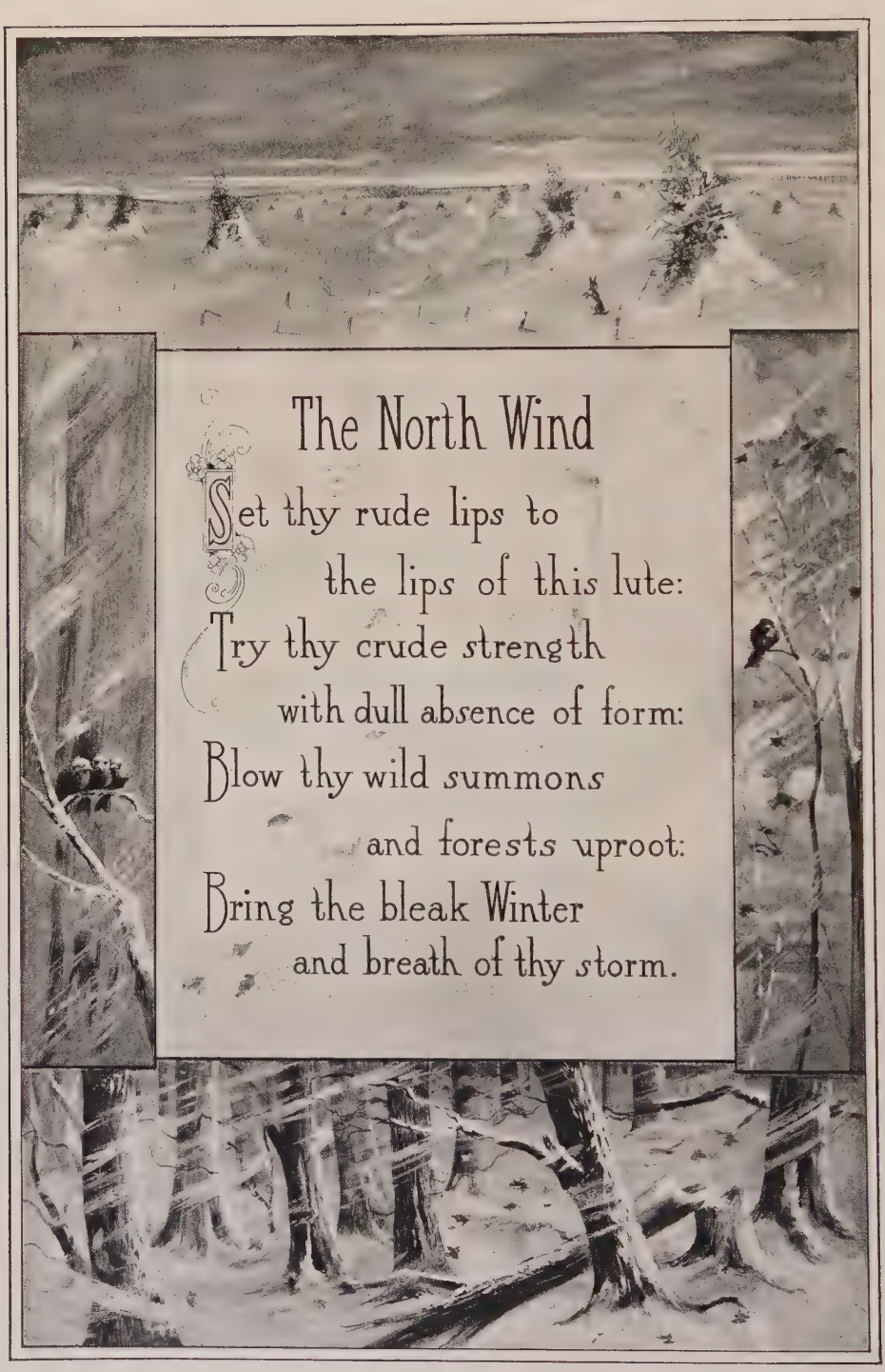
Or to watch prairies by moonlight. Not to have poetry of light poured, as among the hills, into a bowl, but on the wide prairies to distill as an atmosphere from marge to marge. Not so many nights ago I chanced to stand upon a prairie when the moon was full and very silvery. I was as one drenched in a silver haze, a halo such as angels wear about their brows when they are visitants to man A-near the prairies were rapturous in the light

which concealed while it revealed: further the silver shone above the nodding grasses and, far out on the last marge of prairie and of sky, the moonlight enveloped the landscape like a recollection of life. Nothing to hinder the moonlight. No shadow cast. Only silvery light sown to wide spaces where night-winds wakened the nodding grasses with petulant hands, petulant yet caressing. No shadow, only light; and the calling of the wind in whispers to the nodding grasses, "Wake, O wake! We are come: we, moonlight and the summer wind: wake!" and the prairies lift up their lips for the kisses of the moonlight and the wind, and then fall back into a happy sleep, shone through with happy dreams. And moonlight and the prairie winds fall a-wooing each other till the dawn.

PRAIRIE DOGS

THE NORTH WIND

THE ROADWAY OF THE STORM



The North Wind

Set thy rude lips to
the lips of this lute:
Try thy crude strength
with dull absence of form:
Blow thy wild summons
and forests uproot:
Bring the bleak Winter
and breath of thy storm.

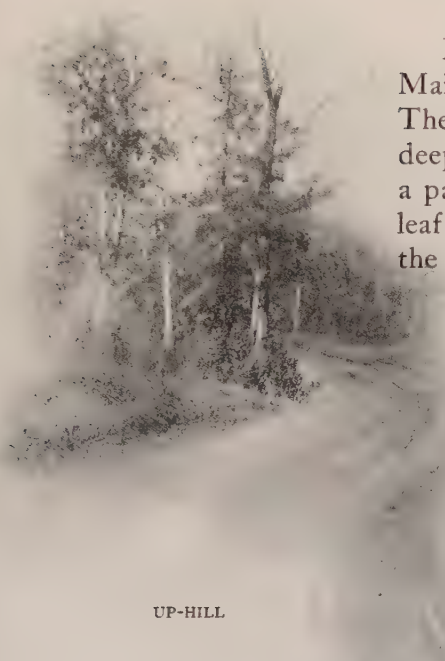
THE NORTH WIND

I SAW A BLUEBIRD

THIS THE BLUEBIRD SANG OF

REST.

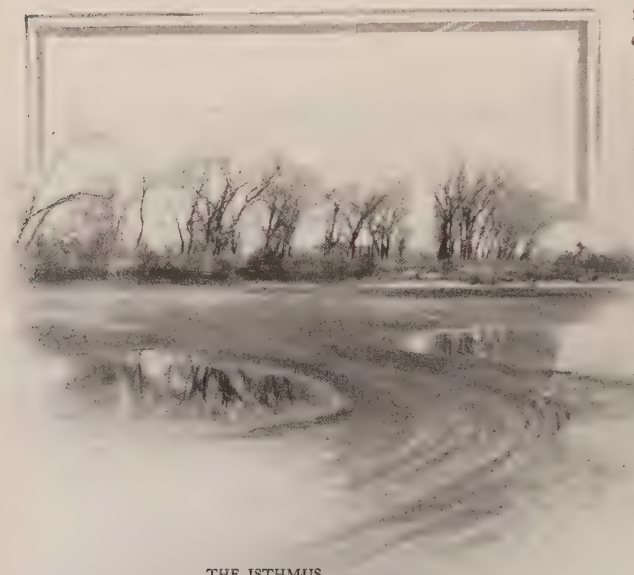
I SAW A BLUEBIRD



UP-HILL

I was drifting along on a Fast Mail on a gray morning in February. The wagon-road waded along knee-deep in mud, like a tired soldier. Not a patch of snow as big as a catalpa-leaf was to be seen anywhere; for in the last two days a south wind had been scrubbing every snowdrift from field, prairie, and hill. Wheatfields lie brown as hazel-nuts in long, threadlike rows of apparent death. Plowed fields are ridged in mud you could wade in as in a stream. Horses, scattered over the pasture fields, stand moodily, as sulking about—we know not what. Though it is morning, the sun is unsocial, and will not so much as peep from behind his shutters. He is as careless of us as the squalling bluejay. The landscape near and far is patched with pools of dirty water, fresh wrung from dirty scars of snow, now vanished. The visible world of field, sky, habitation, stream, drift and fall of smoke, has a disappointed look as of a disappointed emigrant. No hint of animation is discoverable. Everything seems tired, peevish, and unanticipative. Even the water-pools approach

unloveliness as nearly as water can; for water is like a woman, almost predestined to be beautiful. But now the pools are edged with mud: the sky is rather muddy itself: the tuck seems to be taken out of things. The girl at the station has n't "get-up" enough to say, "Dad bob it!"—and this is the last straw, positively the last straw. When a girl won't ejaculate, things are wholly out of joint.



THE ISTHMUS

The Fast Mail leaps on as if to escape the monotony, saying as nearly as I can get at it, "Let us get out of here." The no-account look of everything gives a man with ruddy temperament a jolting setback. The earth out at the elbows, knees, breast, and back, sprawling like a sick man in a garret,—that is all there is of this landscape anyhow.

I am about to lose interest in this particular out-of-doors, a thing damaging to its character; for when I lose interest in this unhoused earth it has few friends left in these parts. I am a friend Nature sets store by; not that I am discriminating or consequential (that would be absurd), but that I am an *infatuee*. Everything out-of-doors knows that. They snub me as knowing I like them; for Nature, like woman, snubs her beaus. But I am out of sorts with this landscape, and about to turn my eyes from this shifting scene of muddy road, muddy earth, muddy

sky, muddy cattle, muddy water-patches, muddy prairies, muddy creeks, muddy everything,—turn eyes from them to my book, when, just as I am digging for my book with one hand and one eye, and giving good-bye to the muddy outside with the other eye, I catch sight of a bird wabbling along the dingy sky, coming along lamely, as if its wings were a trifle rusty at the joints, and on a sudden the bird makes a dab at a fence-post, and a barbed-wire fence-post at that, gives a flirt with his wings, and settles; and I begin to whistle a lyric of the Spring: for it is a bluebird.

And the train swept on in its usual hurry, giving me no time to say a social "howd'ye" to this precious immigrant, nor to ask, why did he come so soon, nor whether he had flitted alone or in sweet company. A puff of smoke along my car-window, a lurch of the train trying to fit its body to a trumped-up curve, a lunge to the forward, and the blessed bluebird is lost to my sight, but not to my heart; no, no! I whistle my impromptu Spring tune, careless of who hears me. Spring is somewhere around, with her apron full of johnny-jump-ups, and swelling crimson of the red-buds, and the flash of green of the earliest grasses growing in the shelter of wooded ravines. A bluebird has come; and the sky-blue, of which he is a tatter, will come hurrying, and before the world is many days older I think to see the zigzag of lightning along some melancholy cloud, and hear the salute of the first cannon of thunder. And the landscape smiles at me with a kind of chuckling laughter, like an old joker; and the haystacks look at me jocosely; and the clouds lift their surly eyebrows; and the

IN SUMMER'S PRIME

cornshocks, ankle-deep in the mud of muddy cornfields, seem to be finding their rasping voices, and saying, "We must get a hustle on us, and get out of here, or the old man will plow us under; boys, get a move on!" And the mud-road sulks along, but is getting dry at intervals; and the black fields are itching to be scratched by the harrow and the plow; and the colts and calves have a jaunty look, like going to a fair. What ails this country anyhow? Things are looking up. I am looking up myself. I sing my lyric of the Spring. What ails us all? Why, the bluebird ails us. His blue wings have fanned my sky into cloudless and abundant blue. What if I had heard the bluebird sing? Bless me, it would have been midsummer in my heart! My voice, my wistful heart, resist no more. Sing, sing! The solitary bluebird owns the world; and his coming makes our sadness glad.

Thy trivial wings so trivial were,
They barely served to make a blur
Of Spring's sky blue, a moment's space.

But trivial though thy blue wings were,
Which barely served to make a blur,
They banished Winter by their grace.

A WALK IN LATE NOVEMBER

THE DIM NOVEMBER DISTANCE

"LATE, LATE, SO LATE"

A WALK IN LATE NOVEMBER

WHEN WINTER COMES

Never think you must go far from home to fall in with the poetry of nature. The stay-at-home life may be rich in sight and acquisition. Wordsworth, in his solemn "Ode to Immortality," says,

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy;"

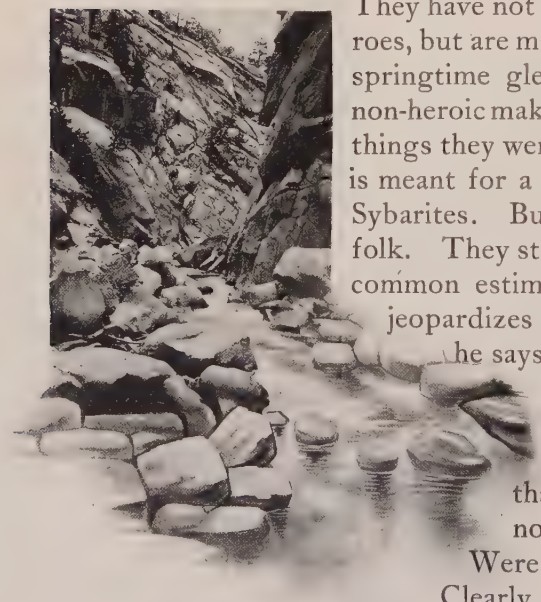
a saying true, but not a whole truth. Heaven lies about us always, provided we care for heaven and watch for it. Heaven is a perpetuity. We walk on the ground, but in the sky. To watch for the heavenly is not to be disappointed, seeing heaven never disappoints anybody. Close at home I will always venture to find quiet loveliness nobody can quite describe, yet fitted to fill the heart with quiet laughter.

The time is late November. Trees are leafless and forsaken. The landscape has, in the main, forgotten it ever was green with springtime, or a-bloom with Summer. But beauty has not departed. Beauty never goes on a vacation, but, as some sweet house-

keeping mother, always stays at home. The wind has a touch of winter in it. The sky is packed with clouds running to and fro, like soldiers seeking position for battle. This day, some would call gloomy. I call the day a benediction. Under the sky there is always room and healthy occupation for our thoughts. In just a minute, by the calendar, Winter will be here; but snows are not choking the fields and lying in drifts along the hills. No premonition of such days is on us, save gray glooms of cloud, which might, in an effortless way, sift snows down if they would. Late Autumn nearing Winter, but Autumn yet. Swallows and thrushes and meadow-larks are gone as soon as leaves begin

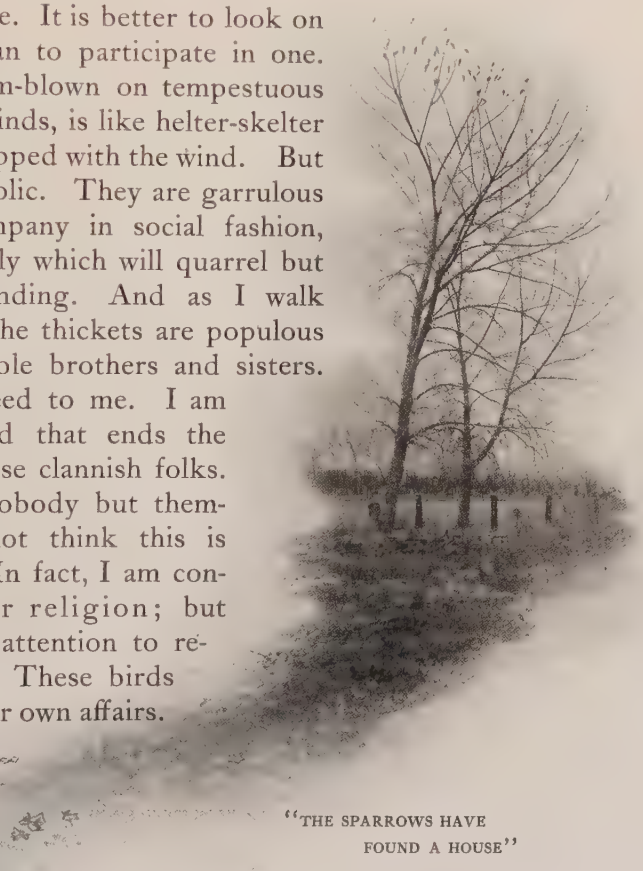
"To rustle to the rabbit's tread."

They are professional lovers of sunny weather, and will not campaign against the stretch of wintry days. Shivering is not in their program. Sturdy or valiant, you can not think them. They have not the making of martyrs or heroes, but are makers of summer melody and springtime glee. We will not fault their non-heroic make-up, but rather rejoice in the things they were and did. Not everybody is meant for a Trojan, anyway. Some are Sybarites. But the sparrows are another folk. They stay. They stay too much, in common estimation. I know that. One jeopardizes his standing in society when he says a good word for that bit of pugilism, the English sparrow; and yet, coming to think of it, how could he be other than a little hostile? Does he not come of fighting stock? Were not his forbears marauders? Clearly, this is heredity. Clumps of bushes, where the thickets of the roadside are tangled with many a weed and



JOURNEYING

bramble,—there the sparrows bicker. They are indiscriminate warriors; domestic or foreign battle is of no consequence with them. Their home etiquette, I grant you, is not scriptural, but is interesting when one happens not to belong to the family. Of course that makes a difference. It is better to look on a family fuss than to participate in one. A sparrow, storm-blown on tempestuous Fall or Winter winds, is like helter-skelter brown leaves whipped with the wind. But they enjoy the frolic. They are garrulous folk. They company in social fashion, like a large family which will quarrel but loves notwithstanding. And as I walk along this road the thickets are populous with these irascible brothers and sisters. They give no heed to me. I am no sparrow; and that ends the business with these clannish folks. Birds care for nobody but themselves. I can not think this is good religion. In fact, I am confident it is poor religion; but birds give scant attention to religious matters. These birds are busy with their own affairs. Man is absolutely outside their considerations. Man walks: sparrows fly: why should such aristocrats as birds take any note of such plebeians as men? I have it not in my heart to be angry with them. They have appearances on their side. Men do cut a sorry figure compared with birds. Really they humble me to my proper proportions. You can not well stay an egotist if you stay with the birds.



"THE SPARROWS HAVE FOUND A HOUSE"

They will, with their nonchalant snubbing, bring the haughtiest among us to his senses. But one thing restores my complacency, at least in part. If these sparrows do not notice me, neither do they notice anything save themselves. The somber skies they care nothing for; nor do they give heed to skies flushed with dawn, save to use it as a borrowed watch to get up by; nor do they deign to give a thought to skies glorious with noon. No, they are busy holding fete-day every day. And I stand and watch them as a beggar may stand and watch a king's pageant flaming by. Then, with a puff of wind, they drift along the frowzy undergrowth, scolding the winds as men and women do.

In late November, nature seems a bankrupt. In Summer every plant uses its chances growing after a goodly fashion; never lost in the tangle of varied, growing things, but striving out boldly toward the sun, as if it shined for this plant alone. In a growing plant is a sturdy independence, be it weed, or flower, or grass-blade, or the leap of growing corn, or the shag of woods. In Summer those

'MINNEHAHA, LAUGHING WATER''

HERE AUTUMN WEEPS

wild energies of life are at work, and make for independency of growth, attitude, action. In November this prolixity of energy is less than a memory. Life is bankrupt. Weeds have been whipped with the rains and winds, so that now they are broken and fallen into adversity, like decayed gentility. The thickets are ruins, and, like all ruins, have pathos and to spare. I hear the drops of waters as from the eaves of some neighboring roof; and the roof is a ledge of rocks from whose seams waters trickle without intermission as if the rain upon this roof never wearied of falling. Shut your eyes and hear the drip of rain from the eaves of your boyhood home. And memories crowd

THE BRIDGE

thick as swallows on an ancient barn-roof. A solitary mullein grows on the face of the rocky wall like a huge rosette. Wild catnip sprawls along the ledges, with here and there a green of summer, fresh and fair, upon the leaves.

Down a long bank wild blackberries grow, with not a leaf lost so far as I could discern. I have always noted how those plants not yet grown to the dignity of vines, but looking like shrubs, hold with singular tenaciousness to their foliage. I like their grit. Some of their leaves are a bright green yet, though more are tinted a trifle, and many seem to have had the dregs of wine spilled on them. These plants are mountaineers in a small way, liking to

LEAFLESS

climb short or long acclivities; and they people this bank with reminiscent loveliness.

Below the hill a river washes moodily and with drowsy speed. A wooden bridge lumbers across the stream; and a wooden bridge has personality, a thing no steel bridge possesses. Iron is, in the multitude of cases at least, intrinsically utilitarian, and so bothers me, although I rejoice in its amazing usefulness. Iron is the prose of architecture and the arts, stone being the verse. But the wooden bridge has a selfhood I enjoy. This bridge is old and covered. Lovers might stand on sunny days in its shadow, and listen to the whispers of the waters or the beating of their own hearts, or to the swish of the waters as they glide in leisurely haste under the shadow of the bridge, and ripple against the piers. How sweet the voices of rivers are! Moving water is never voiceless; and my own observation of stream and lake and pool and sea is, that water is seldom quiet. It sings and shouts and thunders in seas, like the rush of clanging dragoons; or tinkles like sheep-bells heard in a woodlawn pasture-land; or sinks into furtive whispers; but, save on occasions rare as a woodthrush note, rivers are not quiet, and only on trivial pools, when the wind is still, will the speech of the waters be quiet. It is worth while to lie with ear against the rim of quiet streams to hear the waters; for really they are telling their secrets, if only in whispering whispers, like words of peculiar tenderness meant for those

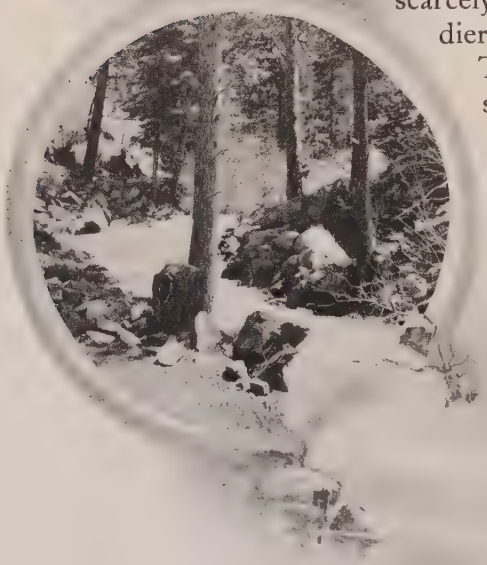
we love the most. And this river is saying in mellow tones its reiterant story; and where a ripple wades across stream the waters lift voices so that school-boys passing would hear the words spoken; and when caught by a log fallen from the bank, scolding it as an intruder; but the drift of the waters toward a far-off, unseen sea makes a daintier music, like hushed laughter from those we do not see. And under this cloudy sky the voices grow tender; and the river is taking me into its confidence; and what the story was I will not, as becomes a friend, disclose; but should you come hither, the stream will deal kindly with you as with me.

And here is some belated golden-rod, with leaves green as in Summer; and the rare gold flushing warm on the November air is grateful remembrance of a long Summer of golden sunlight, spendthrift of beauty. I go down. I hasten down the bank toward this belated splendor, eagerly as one would go to meet a friend. How good to meet golden-rod in the out-of-the-way place of this time of year, when I had never thought but that all its laughing light was past and dead as the light of a faded evening cloud! I gather the late gold, some of the buds being scarcely in bloom, and cherish hope that in the warmth of my study these belated buds may fling aside their green cloaks, and show the flash of their autumn glory, and that, lifting my eyes in the dim light of my study, I shall be greeted with the glow of September

STORM-BROKEN

days, and hear the drone of bees as I did when the blue haze began to hug the distant scene.

Along the road are logs ready for the mill. A fallen tree is to me like a fallen soldier. I have a fight with myself, at such times, to keep my imagination free from the old mythology which would make a tree a thing not less than human. But apart from that ancient seizure of my imagination, there is a modernity of interpretation which makes the dead soldier and the felled tree similar, and induces a regret wide and deep. Neither shall rise again. Ruthlessness has slaughtered them. That they died in a worthy cause may be quite true. But this scarcely lessens the pathos of the soldier or the tree. They are gone. Their abundant vitality and strength and courage and uncomplaint compel our admiration. No battle shall clang against them evermore. The trumpets of wind or carnage shall be dumb. They will hear such tumults never hereafter. For all their wild and tempestuous might, they are slain. Death hath hacked them down with his malignant sword. Because they fought with such glad zeal, the death of them makes a bright day sad. The trees lie hopeless like a soldier dead. The trunks which used to tower so bravely in the forest are prone now, and voiceless. But this fallen bole exudes odors. Do not odors of flowers and trees and new-mown hay trick you into poetry? These aromas must remain among the perpetual mysteries nature shelters. In what laboratory are these arboreal per-

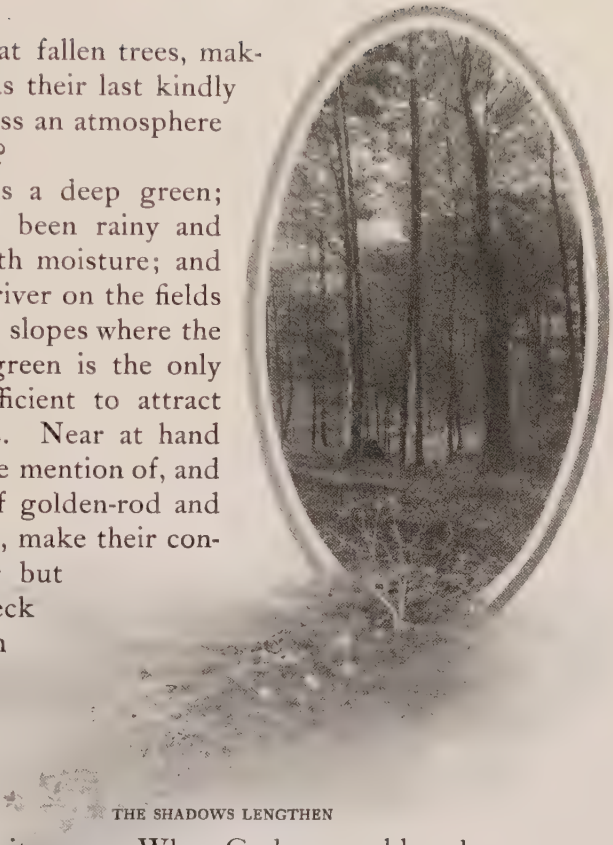


SINGING

A MEMORY OF SUMMER

fumes distilled so that fallen trees, making no lament, give as their last kindly gift of gracious largess an atmosphere saturated with odors?

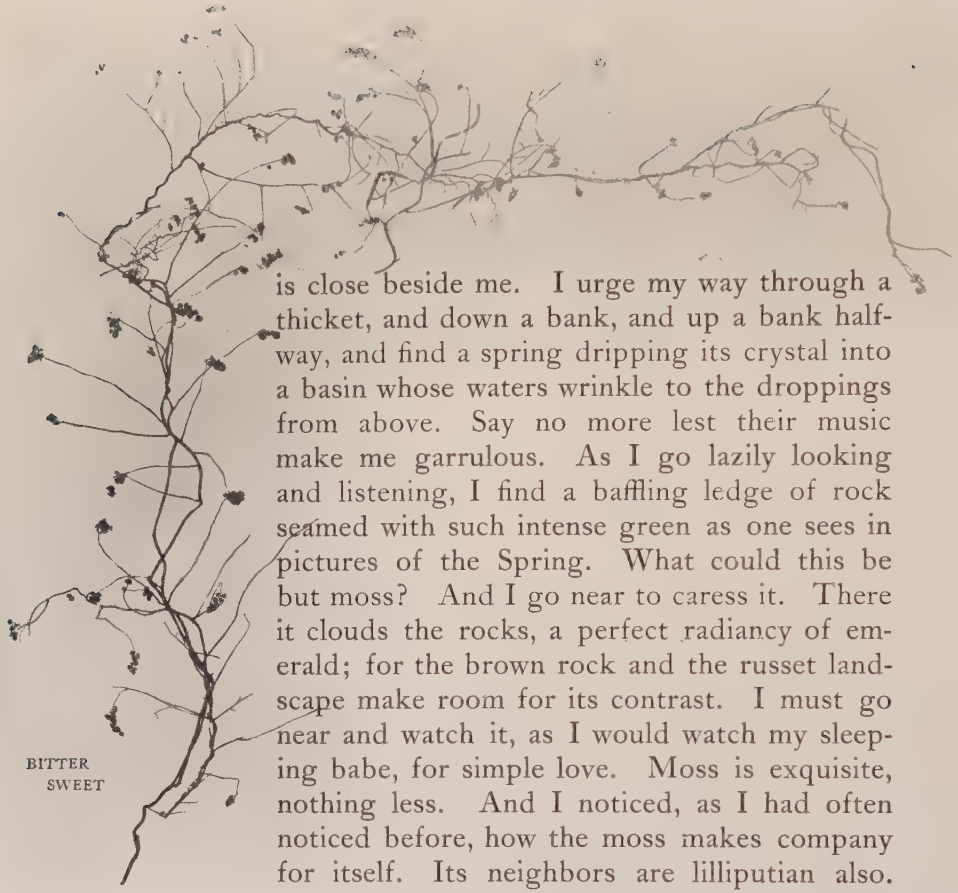
The blue grass is a deep green; for the Autumn has been rainy and the soil is soaked with moisture; and as I look across the river on the fields of russet corn and up slopes where the forests gather, this green is the only hint of Summer sufficient to attract the eyes at distances. Near at hand the blackberries made mention of, and mullein and spikes of golden-rod and knots of violet leaves, make their contribution of Summer but are not sufficient to fleck the landscape with their greens. Grass is so modest, never obtrusive, yet always background of



THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN

beauty for beauty not its own. When God gave a blue sky and a green undulation of vale and hill, of grass and leaf, He was our Lover not less than when He broke the sky with mass of mountain or separated the continents with the "great unvintaged ocean." And the violets cluster bloomless, to be sure, but reminiscent blues strangely sweet with departed grace. One violet gives me all the Spring.

A hid music calls me. I have passed beyond the river voices, having climbed the bank, and hunting (it is good to hunt for things out on hill or fields or in the shadowed tangles of a wood), I find a secret spring, of whose presence I had not been apprised but for its music. Music is betrayer of rivulet or forest bird of happy heart. A spring



BITTER SWEET

is close beside me. I urge my way through a thicket, and down a bank, and up a bank halfway, and find a spring dripping its crystal into a basin whose waters wrinkle to the droppings from above. Say no more lest their music make me garrulous. As I go lazily looking and listening, I find a baffling ledge of rock seamed with such intense green as one sees in pictures of the Spring. What could this be but moss? And I go near to caress it. There it clouds the rocks, a perfect radiancy of emerald; for the brown rock and the russet landscape make room for its contrast. I must go near and watch it, as I would watch my sleeping babe, for simple love. Moss is exquisite, nothing less. And I noticed, as I had often noticed before, how the moss makes company for itself. Its neighbors are lilliputian also. Such wee plants growing alongside, whether out of courtesy or from necessity,—who knows? But these are plants in miniature, so daintily but so perfectly done, they mind me of the exquisite workmanship of certain ancient intaglios I am a happy possessor of. It is so good to sprawl and look at these baby plants, semblances of the larger world of growing things. By being smaller they lose nothing, but rather gain. The plants I see look like violet leaves done after some fairy pattern; and their dainty beauty makes them fit neighbors for the mosses. A little remove from where these bright green mosses veined the rocks was a brawny ledge thrusting itself like an intruder. Here I noted a sharp and lovely contrast. Moss lay hugging the rock with its thrilling green, but sending up a

very forest of reddish trunks, so that I seemed looking on a pine forest on the ledge of high mountains. They stood bravely as if great enough to be

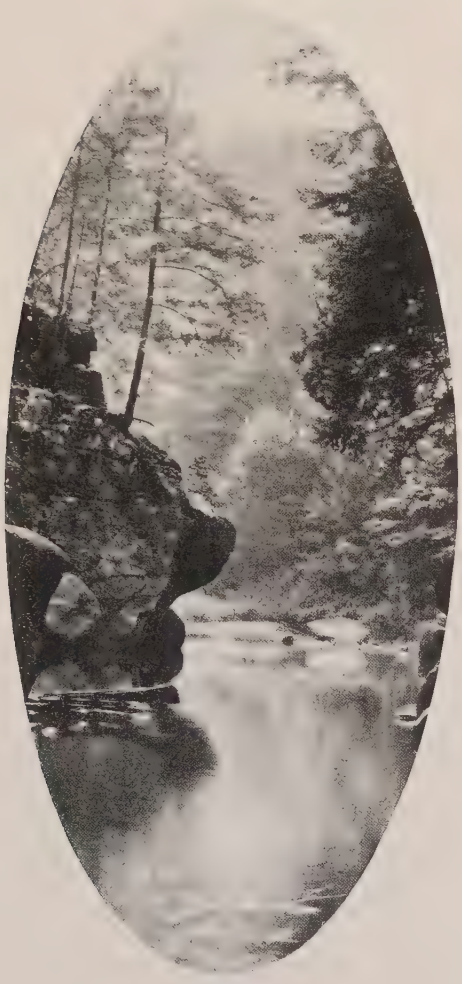
"Masts for some huge ammiral."

These were forests such as we see climbing icy peaks upon the frosty window-panes. Looking again, they seemed "palisades of pine-trees" seen in remote perspective. If there be fairie-land, I dare avouch the forests affording shadow from the heat and giving music, for the glades are moss-forests primeval, such as I looked on this latest autumn day on the bluffs which sentineled White River as it strides toward the Wabash, hidden from sight by woodlands and hills.

The lack of other than plant-life certifies the nearing of Winter. Aside from the sparrows told of, I saw no animal life, save some sheep in a distant meadow and one rabbit, who thought me a hunter and ran, "puir thing," not knowing I did not know which end of the gun should be pointed his way if murder had been in my heart, and that I was no fratricidal soul, having only mild intent, not being on a tour of hurting but one of recreative sight-seeing, looking about to see what God was doing in His out-doors when Fall was in its dull November.

BUILDED BESIDE THE STREAM

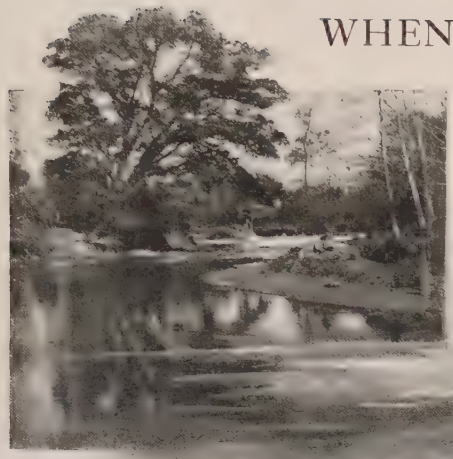
WHEN THE FROGS SING



LISTEN!

WHERE THE FROGS SING

WHEN THE FROGS SING



AFTERWHILES

When the frogs sing—did I hear you giggle? I feel sure I heard you giggle. Though you look sober, you are hilarious. Your risibilities are upset by this rustic talking of frogs singing. How absurd! Giggle, giggle, giggle, frogs croak, giggle, giggilior, giggilissimus! ha, ha, ha! sing frogs! Croak is the word. But not to be a stickler about words,—for a countryman's vocabulary is meager. He is alone so much, and trails the plow, shocks the wheat, and has all such solitary employments. He has need of farm terms; such as eggs, butter, grass, hay, corn, grapes, cabbages, apples, horse, lariat, haying, rain, dew, mud, sowing, reaping, rhubarb, onions (the odor is on us), sleep, work, love, God's-acre, sunrise, moonlight, stars, God,—simple words like these stock us countrymen up till our brain is crowded. You will not think me a stickler for words, but I must be firm at this point. Sing is the word when frogs tune up. With deference to you, friend, they do not croak. Theirs are the merriest voices of the spring. Frogs come from—we know not where: and all of a sudden the night is filled with their singing. Other singers get

above us when they sing. A choir does: a bird does. Even a quail likes to be on a fence when he makes his unequivocal remark. And the meadow-lark wags on a last year's weed or calls blithely from a fence-post; but the frogs are down where muddy waters are in temperature only a trifle above freezing, and these little wretches, without a sign of clothing on them, and so cold-looking, if we could see them in the dark or day, as to make us habitues of clothing shiver: and yet they sing in simple love of life, in joy of being back in a muddy pool under dim starlight. Honor bright, I know not any voices in nature which so inspire me with a sense of the joy of life, unless it be the cricket. Let me not forget his fiddling; but he has a warm hearth, and warmth thaws out most of us. So I will not retract my saying. The frogs' music is most jocund of all the din nature takes delight in. Why should the frog sing? He has no wardrobe. He has no sky. He has not even clear water. Spring is not, at his coming, equipped to toss out a sprig of flower on hardy stem. And spring is not sure she has come to stay. The one sign that spring is here is, that the frogs are singing. It is spring with them. They have bonnie hearts. They sing about so little. My heart, couldst thou not learn a lesson from these singing neighbors of thine? Thou singest not whose blessings no arithmetic can compute. They sing when the sole blessing of their nights and days is that the good God lets them live. O laddies, sing in your sullen pools by night or day, and all the night, while spring is young. When a torrent has drenched out of impetuous skies; when

THE FROG'S TRYSTING PLACE

wind has whipped itself into a whirlwind; when a scowl still wrinkles the brow of the stormy sky; when muddy roads are ankle-deep with new-made mud; when every road-side is turned into a mill-race; when every passenger out late, toiling in the mud, mutters or talks out loud, and says things not worth recording; when the rain still pelts your face spitefully, as angered that you are not indoors; when the whole world is moody,—I have heard the frogs sing in the swollen roadside rivers: sing like merry children. Glee was on them. They were like a choir of wood-birds waking early with the shining east; only not a star winked, not a cloud shoved itself away from shore, like a boat putting out to sea. The water was muddy enough to have made a mud-catfish wipe his specks to see which way to swim; the wind blew cold as coming from a remote glacier; but, did I tell you, the frogs sang as if to split their throats? In the midst of the night and the midst of the mud, I stopped and regaled myself on this hilarious melody. The frogs were singing the doxology, though to no tune I was familiar with, which is no disrespect to them as minstrels; for I am no muscian. Tunes are not my specialty. Not but that I can pitch and carry! I am expert in that. But that is no sign I know a tune. I have

A WORK-DAY RIVER

not infrequently observed how some of us musicians who are least equal to singing are most eager for singing. This is a microbe, this insisting on performing what we can not perform. The singer smiles, but the audience groans. So I pitch and carry, and enjoy hearing my own uplift of tune, but am disqualified from hitting a tune. A tune I consider a trammel; and I am against trammels: and who are they who hand out the iron manacles of sharps and flats, and insist on their being worn? No. Away with them, say I. Let music be untrammeled. But this is a digression. My musical enthusiasm has carried me away. But in this also am I musical. Musicians are carried away with their warblings. Brother Will Shakespeare, of precious memory, made remark of

THE RIPPLES ON THE RIVER

"Such music is in immortal souls."

His reference was to us singers. I feel it. I flush to acknowledge it. I can back and bow to the audience in acknowledgment of this personal reference, not to call it personal thrust. "Music has power"—but I forbear. "You ask me, wondering, why I sing." Many have wondered at that. The musically ungifted have often indulged in this preposterous conception. I sing because I must. Apollo has handed me his lyre (which is fantastical spelling for "liar"), and I *must* use it. I feel like singing a solo now; but I desist. No, friends; do not encore me. It is

THE FROGS' CHOIR LOFT

not just to the *other* singers. Not that my repertoire is exhausted. Far from it. No. I have two songs left, which I have not sung oftener than two hundred times. These are as we singers reckon, new, brand new. But I will not sing now; I will bow, going backward, bow and smile; returning, I do the same; bow, move gracefully backward, smiling, disappear like a dissolving view. But pardon this personal remark.

The frogs—I was, as I recall, speaking of them: was I not? Thank you. I was. I am definite now. I was speaking of the frogs singing the doxology to a new tune. It is their own tune, but is glorious. Honestly, glorious! So little to rejoice over, and such a wealth of rejoicing! They were so eager to sing, and not a musician among them; but they wanted to sing, "Rejoice, rejoice!" and God wrote the music for them, and they all know it; little and big, and all, pitch in; and the sopranos, tenors, altos, basses, start in where they are. The tune and hymn they sing is, "Rejoice; praise God, from whom all blessings flow." And this frog's music may seem trivial to many, but is not trivial to God. The song among the lowly—how He loves it! This, and no other, is to me the wonder of the universe that God has gifted each thing He has created with abundant gladness. To us, voices may be unmusical; but the song is out of the throat, but is of the heart. A woodpecker, say the ornithologists, has no note

SLEEPING WATERS

at all. His vocal organ is his bill, wherewith he hammers out tunes on an old white limb. This is his piano; but his hymn is a happy hymn. He is in love with life; and life is in love with him. He must somehow lift a tune, and so borrows the keyboard of a white branch, long dead and past music, and thus laughs out, "Rejoice!" Ah! Rubenstein, this is your brother pianist. Fraternize with him. "Rejoice!" Blessed tune and deathless music! This is the tune the saints in heaven are playing on silvern lute and golden harp, and making wonderful with their enraptured lips. "Rejoice!" Pitch that tune, my heart.

Friend, are you converted now? Are you persuaded the frogs are singing? When once again spring is come, if

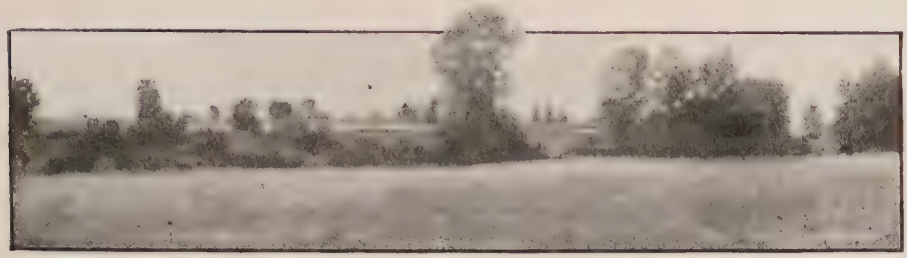
A PLACE OF SONG

coming you might call that bashful look of hers, coming a step and looking backward, or going back a whole day's journey,—when spring is coming, or come, or about to come, and the frogs tune up, friend, listen to them, and wonder you had ever thought their joyous chorusings croakings, and had never known their callings were the music of happy, *happy* hearts.

THE SPRING WIND

THE BLESSED BLUE

IN THE NEW SPRINGTIME



The Spring Wind

O, I am like the shimmer
Of sunlight on the wheat!
My voices they are dimmer
Than lovers' when they meet.

My feet are further going
Than waves that walk the sea;
The wild flowers are a-blowing
And laugh out loud for me.

O, I am Springtime's lover
That wooes with kisses swift;
And flowers like blushes cover
Where late, pale snows did drift.

O, I am called the Spring Wind,
And am in naught forlorn,
And am unto the stars kinned,
And to the dewy morn!

THE OPEN ROAD

BENEATH THE DROWSY TREES

THE ROAD TO THE DYING DAY

GOING?

THE OPEN ROAD

THE open road is always going somewhere, or, perhaps more accurately, acts as if going somewhere. At times it goes nowhere; for instance, to some people's houses. But a road's intentions are good. It starts out blithely. It is open for everybody. It asks no passport. It has no favorites. Raggedness is as welcome as a crowned king. The road is everybody's chance.

Two kinds of road bid for passengers: First, the business road, which is straight, going on fence-lines, sometimes cutting cater-cornering so as to get somewhere right off. This road is not pleased with loiterers, but means business from start to finish and business only. "We are going somewhere, and are in a hurry about it," is what our business road remarks, if it remarks at all. Its motto is, "Hurry up." The second kind of road is the loitering road. It goes not by straight lines but by curves. It meanders as a stream. A certain vagabond air in its manner commends this road to all vagabonds. In its dictionary is no such word as hurry; but it goes off somewhere, any-

where, for a lark, sometimes for a spree, always for fun; going for the sake of going, predisposed to loiter. It has a sedentary air, as to say, "Let us sit down to rest," impressing you always as if climbing a mountain road, being on the lookout for shadow of tree to sit in and catch the wandering wind blowing from far peaks sprinkled with recent snows or under a granite bowlder, where the weariness of climbing slips from you like loneliness in the presence of love. Both these roads are necessary. We will not be naggy and object to either but, as with a book or a person, may be permitted to entertain a preference. For me, the open road always; but commend me with a fusillade of laughter to the vagabond road going at a snail-pace anywhere!

I wonder if anybody could take a road and not quietly wonder where it was going. I wonder if the road itself knows its destination. A taciturn body is an open road. You would think, with passengers so many and so diversified, a road would grow garrulous. But whatever your thinkings or mine, the road keeps its own counsel. It is a veritable oyster, never opening lips at brilliant noon or storm-clouded night. All the road thinks itself bound to offer is passage-way, not geography nor sense for passengers. But come to think of it, that would be ludicrous

LOST IN THE WOODS

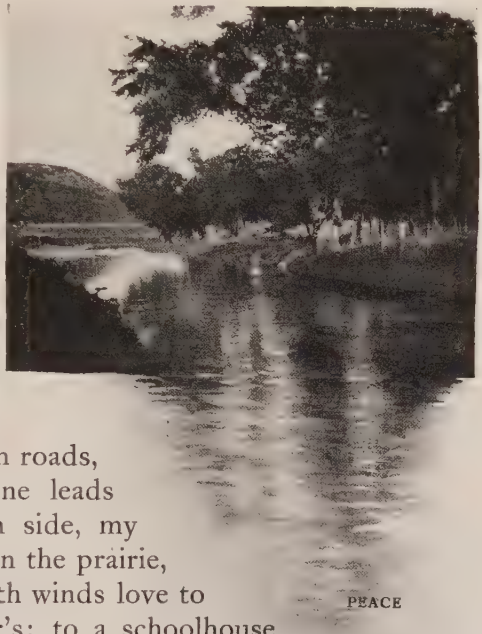
to expect a road to furnish sense for travelers. No road could bear that incumbrance. Death would ensue and that right early. Nobody around just now is erudite enough to make the public college-bred in sense. No, plainly, the road can not be expected to furnish sense or answer questions. To point a direction, to offer thoroughfare, to beguile us to going by a way made ready, certainly that is all one able-bodied citizen should be asked to do.

ALONG A MOUNTAIN STREAM

But an open road invites. It has an insinuating air. While not lifting eyebrow or eyelid, while keeping a discreet silence, it has, after all, a way of jogging a body up to come and go along. I do not under take to describe the method, but name the fact. Every road beckons. If asked to tell how the road acts insinuatingly, I could not for my life tell, but am as certain it does as anything. Each road wants company, and seems to urge, in its mute, shy way, quite past reflecting on or taking oath to, but quite certainly, "Come my way. Go with me. This is a pleasant road. Do n't you think so? Are n't you going this way?" It is like a girl wanting company, and the bashful boy feeling it, not knowing why. The road urges, "Be a traveler. Are you a stay-at-home? Really I thought better of you. I! O, I am going—going? Where? No matter. Come and go along." So, small wonder if men are travelers when the open road beckons. The very fact of unknown destination is an inducement to going. We

shall find out by and by. I know not many things more exhilarant than taking a road you know nothing of, know not whether it will lead up hill or down, by prairie way or forest shadow, along the mystery of the sea or the mystery of pines, along marshes where crimson flowers flame out at you like daggers tipped with fire, or along brown sands that drift like a land of snow; know not whether it goes to some sleepy village, where at night the air is fragrant with the smell of woodsmoke and the whole town seems indoors, or to some crowded tumultuous city, where men jostle and crowd and crush and laugh and curse and swagger or walk worthily to some honorable destination, and dwell in cellars and garrets and squalor fitted to drive men mad, or in opulence and in palaces fitted to house kings, in virtue or vice beyond mentioning; are as good as saints and strong as strength, or weak and wicked so as to make a good heart break at the single thought of it; where women weep out their hearts or laugh outright, touched to rejoicing by labor and by love: or whether it led away from the crowded city ways to quiet lanes festooned by grapevines and wild hops and ivy greenery, and where birds call from the thickets and bid you, "Clear out, every one of you!" Whither goes the road? To the house where God sets apart a place to pray, and where weddings are celebrated, and where children and adults bow together at the altar of the Christ to eat

the broken body and to drink spilled blood, or to God's-acre where the broken-hearted go to bury their beloved and go often afterward to weep and plant rosemary for remembrance, and to lean across the grave and sob, "I love you so, I love you yet." Whither goes the road? Ah me! the one, the only answer is, "This is an open road."



PEACE

How many are the open roads across the landscape of my heart! As I sit to write beside an open road, where cottonwoods keep up their incessant rain and a vagabond brook is gabbling like a pack of girls, they beckon to me, these open roads, through the long years. One leads to a grave upon a mountain side, my mother's; one to a grave upon the prairie, where the west winds and south winds love to wander to and fro, my father's: to a schoolhouse at the village edge, where I was first in love with a funny, freckled little girl, thin, very thin, and her hair done up in three straight lines, straight as sticks, and tied with stratified blue ribbons: and to a farm-house by a stream, its road wandering over the grassy shoulder of a hill, down past fields of corn tossing green in summer and russet in winter, past a watermelon-patch, where melons lay pussy and green on their stomachs through the sprawl of green vines, but inwardly they were pink and watery, and fitted to make a small boy's mouth water and his fingers itch. But they were good to go past and thump (plugging is below a boy's notice: he knows too much to do that). To thump a melon, and hear one sound just right, and then lift his

huge hulk, balance it gayly on the shoulder, hie away fast as bare feet can run to the shade where the timber on the creek builds a tent made just right for watermelon-eating, and then to bust the melon, not cut it,—bust it, and get a hunk of core in a dirty hand: and where are kings and rich people generally? This is satisfaction. Here is a small boy's paradise. He needs no other. And a grosbeak makes remarks, and a Baltimore oriole flames with his amazing sunshine past, as in a huff at not being invited to the fun; and the boy goes on eating watermelon where it grew. Hurrah for the watermelon!—and it is on this road. What a road to travel! Three cheers and a tiger for the watermelon road!—And down the hill sloping slightly but persistently, past the stone barns on the edge of stone quarries, and down along a second bottom of the stream to a clump of oak-trees older than they would care to tell or anybody knows, where shadows are thick, and winds pause to make ready for another blow across prairies which, though out of sight, are yet near at hand; and these trees lift their shag tops toward a prairie-hill eastward, where morning stands tiptoe first, and through innumerable dewdrops glory leaps in ten thousand flames. Under these trees, whither this road has made its way, is a stone house, its two parts almost detached, standing low and stooped, and about whose roof winds moan in Autumn and scream in Winter, and where you may tell the time of day by the dial of tree-shadows slanting on the roof; and in the meaner of these semi-detached houses a lad slept alone, under a roof with only shingles between him and the night-sky. He felt the stars without seeing them. He heard the rain's music. He caught the jargon of the tempest when the wild winters blew. He felt the mantle of solitude wrapping him about and loved the comfort of it. He felt as if he slept on the far fringes of the prairies and the seas and the shadowed edges of the forests interminable and murky. At intervals, in high times in his soul, he felt

THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY

God: and the low-roofed room, unplastered and forlorn, was changed into palatial splendors. That open road! And a road down which a good man came to a child's heart. The man is in heaven these years, and maybe does not know as yet to what he helped a little lad; but the lad, one day not very far removed, will tell him and see his slow smile waft sunshine across his face. But this man came, slept under the dull roof, talked in man-fashion to a child, and said, "You will be a man some day, a good man and act worthily, some day;" and the lad wondered then if he would, and wonders now if he has. The open road a good man took to get to the door of a farmer boy's heart, really it was the straight road to heaven: and who would have thought it?

A road beckons, the road to college; eastward from the cornfield where a lad planted, plowed, planted again, and shucked; eastward along a day vague with October sunshine and sadness, and as the night fell softly and darkness thick-

ONE COUNTRY ROAD

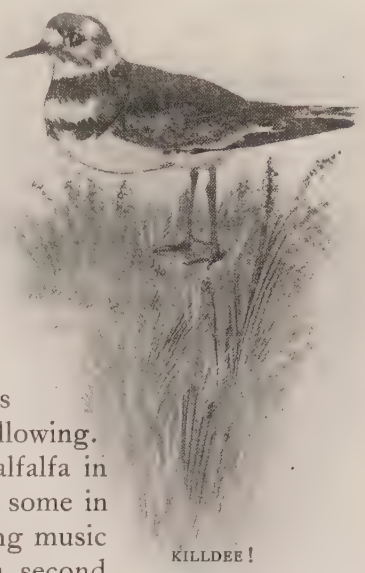
ened, he heard afar the ringing of a bell, a college bell on its far hill, and to him it rang like silver chimes high hung in some stately minster, only more sweet, more sweet; and in the dark, rung in by the chiming of the bell and as silent as the shadows, he came to where his college days began, and where they were to come to honorable conclusion. But the road, and the day, and the night, and the calling of the bell,—he hears them, feels them, sees them all now, pungent as wood-odors at night when wood-odors are plentiful. Such an open road!

And the road leading from the cornfield to the stream where, at noon, the thirsty team and I went for our drink. Its clear pool fed by a crystal spring; the stony bottom discernible through the running water; the shadow beautiful, till the unesthetic horses stumbled in to slake their thirst and break the shadow-picture into fragments; and a broken tree grew close beside this drinking-pool, broken by some ruffian wind or angered thunderbolt, dismantled of green leaves and whispering shadows, but remantled with ivy, wherewith it was festooned like some ivy-mantled tower old as history and sad as grief. In Summer this tower stood green, like a light seen through chrysoprase: a tower stately and fair exceeding words; and in the Fall the tower stood glorious as if quarried from the gullies of sunset and graceful as the flight of swallows that flung themselves night by night in glee along the tinted rimmings of the upper sky. And that road, from field to watering-place, was my training in art instinct and the poetry of history. Not lonely, lovely, ivy-mantled Kenilworth as I saw it last was so beautiful or historied as my ivied castle by my Avon, when I was a plowboy on the Wakarusa.

An open road stands with eyes of invitation, leading from Longmont to the mountains, crowded with shadows and pines and waterfalls and rocks and glad acclivities. The last days of July were moving sluggishly like a

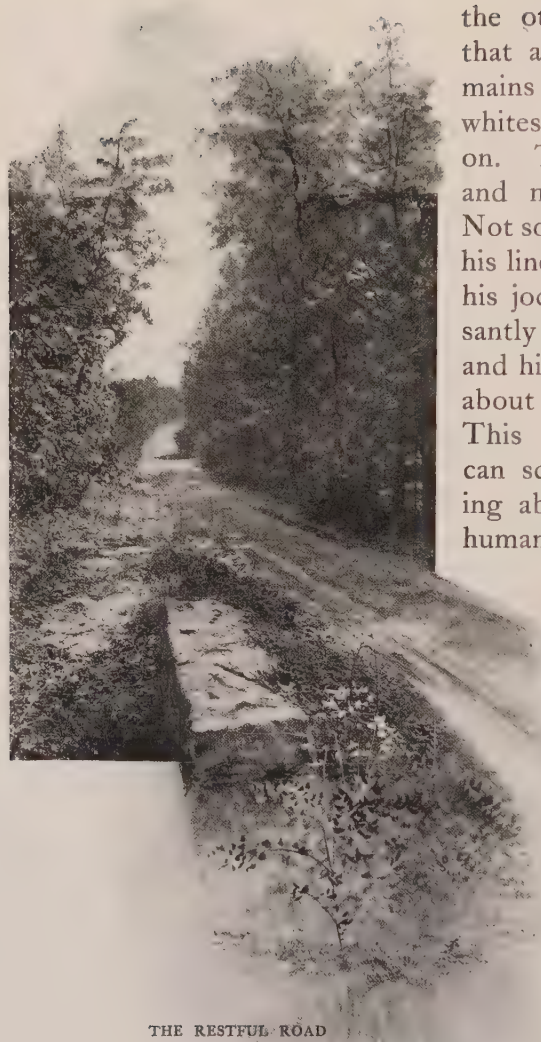
THE ROAD AMONG THE PINES

meadow stream. A road walked out toward the blue mountains. Here was a summons. It was morning by the clock. The sky was mottled cloud and blue. Winds came intermittently. Nature was hard at work. July is not the month when nature does her chores, but the month when she works, her face wrinkled with sweat that drops down on a breast burnt with working in the sun. The road was in no hurry, but wandered on leisurely in vagabond fashion, but looking all the while toward the blue, majestic mountains scarred with snow and bannered with cloud. And to be alone on the open road, that is best. Seeing and talking can not be done at once, and done well. Seeing monopolizes all the faculties. There are none left for talk. So this July road and I out alone; it leading, I following.



KILLDEE!

On either side grow the harvests; alfalfa in purple bloom; wheat ready for reaping, some in process of reaping, the harvester making music good to hear; the gold faltering for a second as irresolute, then giving way to the inevitable, and tossing itself (not being tossed) out in armful bundles of bewildering gold,—the sheaf which must last forever as the symbol of fertility and service and work put into terms of poet and musician. In a certain field, where the irrigating ditch was more than ordinarily lavish of its water supply, killdees in abundance piped their cheerless strain. A dapper lad is the killdee, affecting garments much like Scotch tweeds, and always wearing a spotlessly white standing collar. For the life of me I do not see how he succeeds in keeping it clean all the time. I can't mine, and I wear a lay-down collar. I fear Mr. Dee has his wife wash and iron more than is seemly in a first-class husband. Or maybe she takes a womanly pride in having her husband dressed better than



THE RESTFUL ROAD

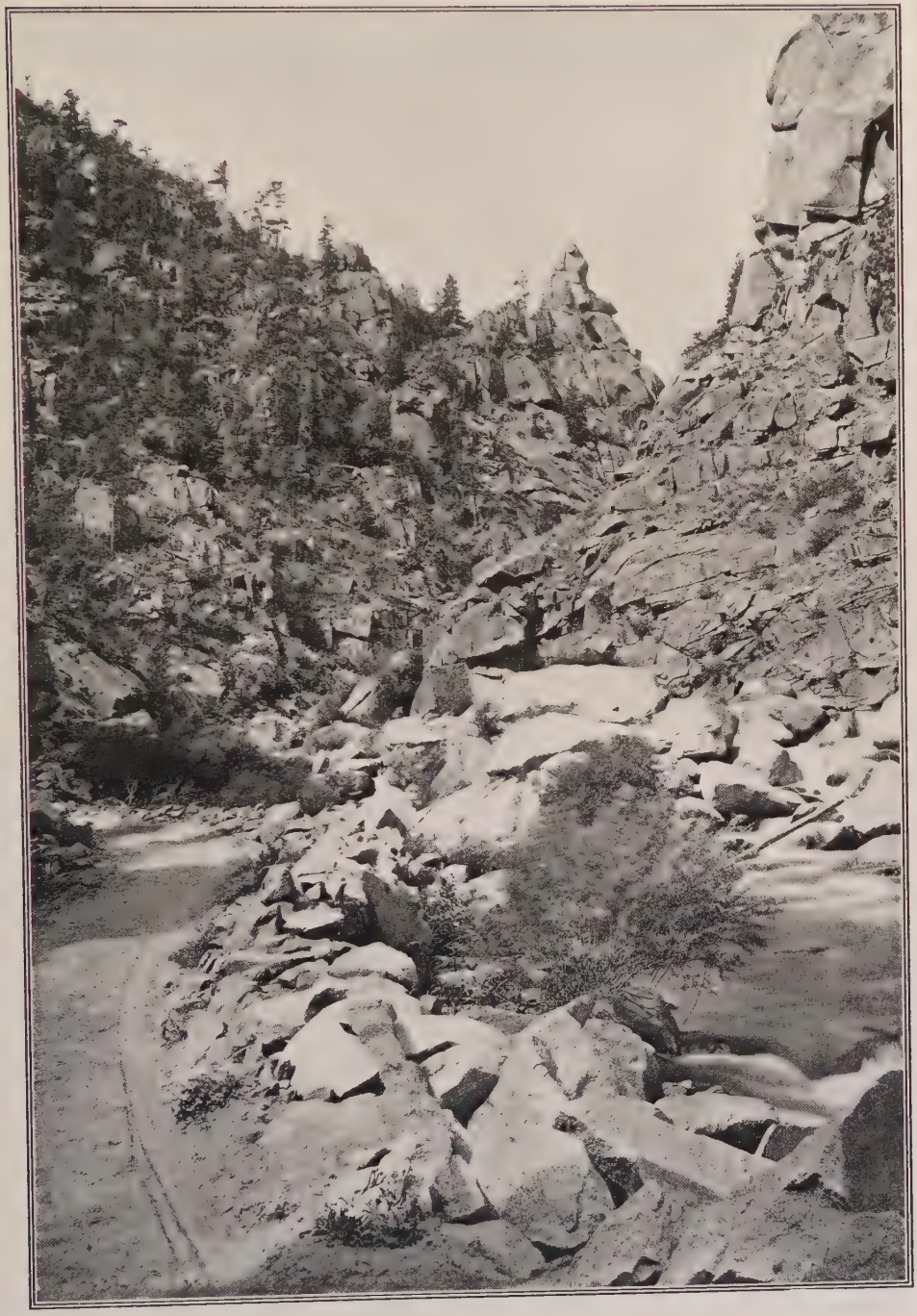
the other birds' husbands. Be that as it may, the fact still remains that Mr. Dee wears the whitest collar I see anybody have on. This day is sweaty-warm, and men-laundered collars wilt. Not so his. Heat nor dust affects his linen, and he struts along with his jocular walk, and talks incessantly about family matters. He and his wife and all the Dees talk about nothing except themselves. This is decidedly domestic. I can scarcely blame them. Talking about one's own family is a human trait much indulged in; and we all do it and enjoy it. Therefore it illy becomes me, a stranger, and foot-passenger to boot, to object to the conversation of so distinguished a gentleman as Mr. Dee, specially when my collar is limp as a wash-rag and I am limp as my collar. Really he may snub me and I will not resent. He looks cool as a cucumber, and I feel hot as embers ready to broil steak. But this lugubrious talk about Dee killed, kill-kill killdeed, is a trifle distressing. These birds look frisky, and we look for them to chirp out some jocose observation; but they never do. The Dees are killed, or about to be, and don't want to be, or they are about to kill

Dees; and all this is distressing, bad enough. Across the field, as well as at my very feet (for I have temporarily crowded through the barb-wire fence to make up to these same killdees), and far out along the sky-line of sound, flying low, the wind carries back "Killdee, dee, dee, dee;" and I find myself on the verge of suggesting that either the walk of this bird should be more pathetic or his talk less so. One's gait and one's talk should keep step. However, the killdees do not think so; and that is the end of it.

And the bee-weed, swarming with bees, tosses its pink blooms; and the sweet clover, with its perfect musk of perfume, so sweet that it is no wonder, as I walk alongside it, the hum of bees is as if a hive were there instead of a flower. Can that be set down as a weed and a nuisance which gives daily bread for the bees and honey for hot biscuits on wintry mornings? These are solemn thoughts, as we ministers say. And alfalfa has strayed out of the field where it has been fenced in, and its smell is sweet, and its bloom is purple as king's robes; and I forget it is grown for hay, and think it is grown for perfume and poesy. God is so given to blending utility with æsthetics. He loves to. And the way is winsome as the laughter of a baby with the outstretching of its chubby little hands. Sunflowers are in evidence, though not in abundance. Golden-rod is moving toward blooming, and in scattered patches is in full bloom, flirting its bunches of strange gold out to make a poor man such as I a trifle covetous. Horsemint, with its unkempt frowzy locks of red, stands precise as a soldier. Horsemint has evidently not read of combs, and affects them no more than a Mojave Indian. But I will not criticise. It would not be becoming. And the mountains stand far off, very wonderful in their wealth of shadow and bewilderment of blue-and-white gleam of many a snowy peak. And the open road had led me on such a way, all gladness and comfort, and outlook and uplook. The near-at-hand was full of

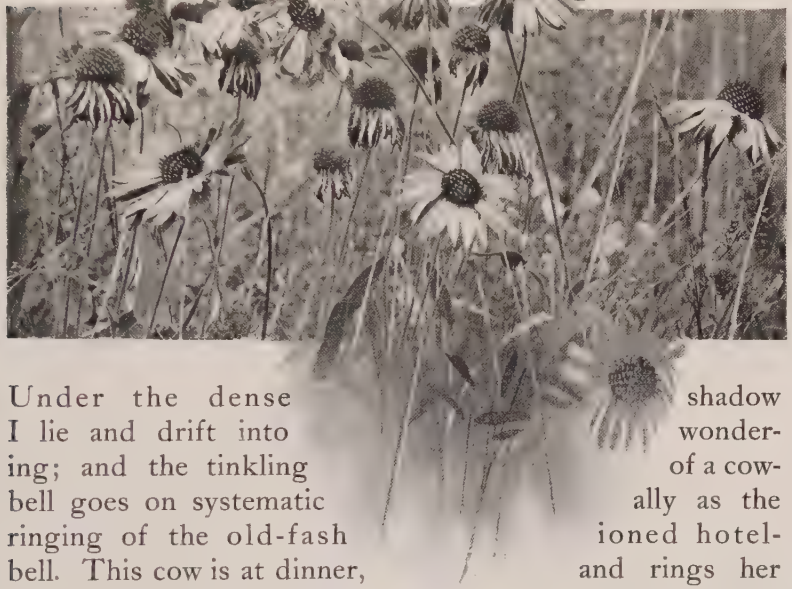
homely beauty, and the far-off, full of the sublime, mountains and skies and the wide landscapes beyond both, which lead out, forever out.

One other road led among the hills; turning, turning, no manner of method in its goings; just a gadding road, busy going nowhere as any one knows of; leading down along a shy brook, whispering, not talking aloud; or over a bridge rotting down, as anybody can see or feel who walks across it, for it teeters so beneath the foot, but is delightful in its rusticity; and if the sagging thing fell, who would be hurt? Only a dousing in a summer stream; and who would worry at a thing like that? Who would, is not worthy to be a passenger on the outside of nature's coach. So along the turnings of the brook, road nor brook in any hurry as is apparent, and up, climbing as uncertain in intent; then past a farm-house good to look at, minding a man of country dinners where dishes were not many but victuals inviting, chicken brown and irresistible, and biscuits fresh from where biscuits ought to come; past such a farm-house, hard to pass therefore; past haycocks, along a ravine through the field, where children were playing,—Road, stop a minute and look. Can you let children play, and you not care to stand stock-still and look? So, that is better. We are in no hurry while children play—with their petulancies, giggles, talkings all at once, wild shriekings, and mischievousness, and quarrelings soon made, soon ended. Well, it is all good, isn't it, open Road? We were that way once. Bless me, you and I are laughing like children ourselves. I am glad I came this way; and the road chuckles from gladness, and mosies on under deep shade cast by an old elm where the sun has no chance at shining. Elms beat parasols to keep off the sun. When an elm sets his head to make shadow, the sun may as well quit business. What a luxury to lie down, as the road and I do, in this somnolent shadow, where not one grass-blade of sunlight pierces through, and, lying on the back, look



THE MOUNTAIN ROAD

through the chequered roofing of leaves, green as if fresh dripping with the drench of nature's dyes! How thick an elm-tree foliage is! Leaves small, but multitudinous. The sycamore has foliage big as lily-pads, but sunlight can slip round those leaves in a jiffy, and give your lips a burning kiss, and the leaves never know it; but elm-leaves make a roof good to be under in a summer shower, unless it lasts too long.



A GROUP OF SUNS

Under the dense shadow I lie and drift into wondering; and the tinkling of a cow-bell goes on systematically as the ringing of the old-fashioned hotel-bell. This cow is at dinner, and rings her own dinner-bell, and the sound of it reminds me—but no matter. I am not become garrulous with age. The brook—it, too, in shadow—is laughing at some joke of its own; and I laugh, not knowing the joke. That is the good of anybody, brook or woman or man, laughing out loud. The people who hear can laugh with them without the chore of finding out the joke. But the open road grows weary of too much loitering, and goes uphill now in earnest, and through a gap in the fence along toilingly, but not complainingly; up to the edging of hills that drip like house-eaves in Autumn;

past apple-trees grown old in years and fruitage, and now resting from their labors, but not from their greenery or songs of hid birds, or shadows, where the lazy cows may stand and ruminate. Under the shadows we shall find balsam and shade, both enticing; and thither the road leads us worn almost to a thread of a pathway, but losing nothing in beauty and wayward fancy. And it loiters beside a deserted cabin occupied only by emptiness and memories and the slow climbing of the mosses, and on—well, the road is dim and grown green, and springs beneath the foot, and has itself forgotten where it was going. Maybe the road is fatigued with the journey or old age, or both. Yet I never thought of its being an aged road when we made our start together. But something ails the road. It has dwindled away to a slip of green amongst the trees. But what trees! Trees cresting the hill like green spray, or standing tiptoe, looking far; pausing for a momentary glimpse of the Hudson lying to the westward; catching a glimpse of the Housatonic, lying like a twisted silver rib-band in the valley, not quite remote, not quite near at hand; seeing hills toss up in indolent motion as of a tired wave but staying suffused with music of birds and winds, and chequered with sunlight and shadow and crossed with happy hollows where waters make merry all the day and all the night; trees standing tiptoe, and failing to see the stream for which their eyes are lifting, but seeing the sky which leans over all—river and hilltops and treetops,—seeing the sky and sighting the sun.

"Counting the hilltops one by one."

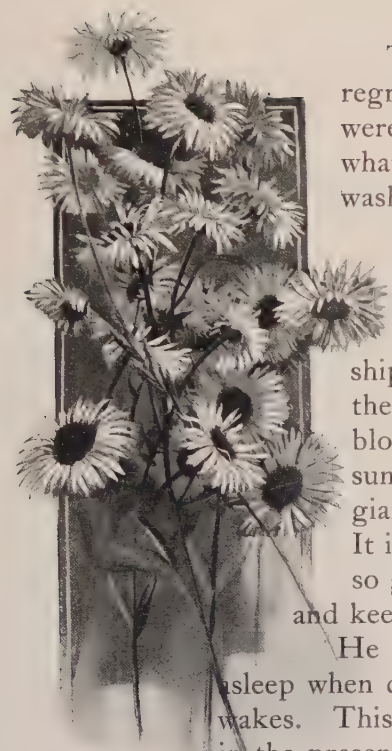
And my road has fallen fast asleep amongst these hilltop trees. And you are well asleep, vagabond Rip Van Winkle; for did we not read of him that he awoke rusty of joints and brain, and with gun bitten into with rust and rottenness? But this road is fast asleep forever, clean tired out with journeyings. And the trees, now I understand, the trees are swaying a lullaby.

SUNFLOWERS

STRAGGLING SUNLIGHT

THE STARRY SKY

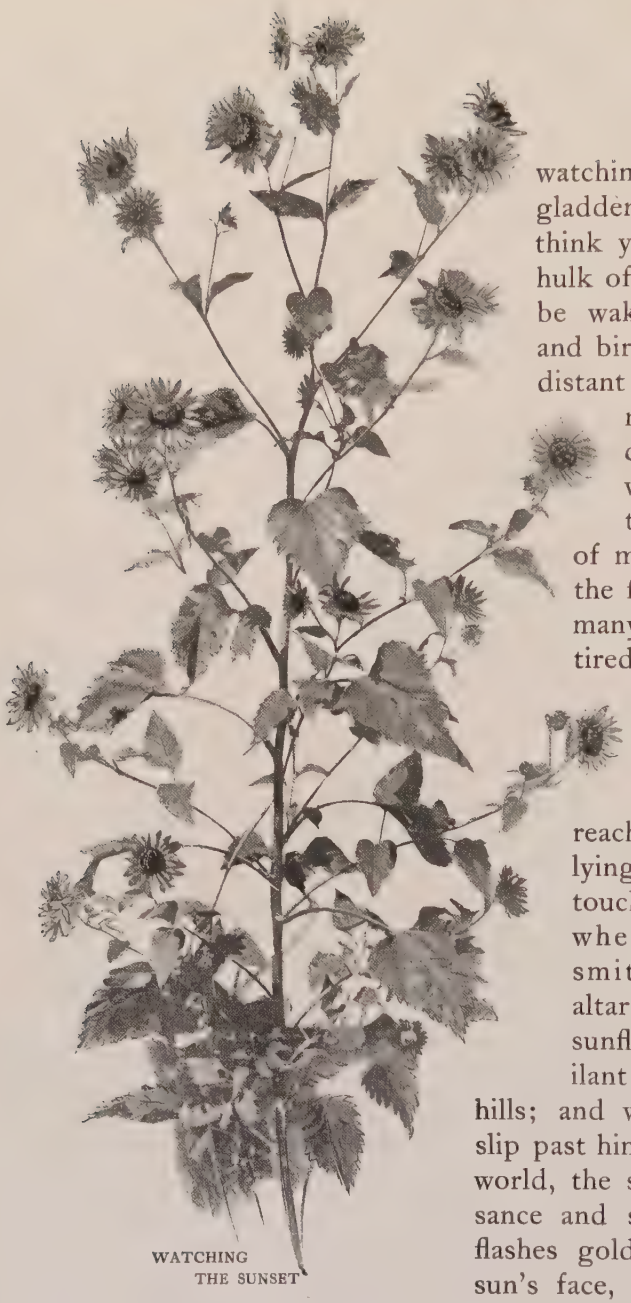
SUNFLOWERS



SUMMER LAMPS

THE sunflower is a heathen. This is regrettable. It is high time all heathen were converted. But the sunflower is what he has been since the first noon washed his disc with glory,—a Parsee. I think no hope of reformation need be entertained. Sun-worshiper he is pre-ordained to be. But who could blame a flower for being a sun-worshiper? The one wonder is that all of them are not. But whoever among blooming things fails in allegiancy to the sun, the sunflower does not. That allegiancy is pathetic as well as engaging. It is so unwavering, so absolute, so frank, so glad. Smile for smile this flower gives and keeps no reckoning.

He keeps vigil for the sun. Poppies fall asleep when daylight fades, to wake when daylight wakes. This seems a high allegiancy, and is, but in the presence of a higher, must make way. Sunflowers fear to go to sleep at evening lest they should not be awake to greet the sun. He must not find his votaries asleep. He must find them awake and watching for his coming. And so, when the sun lifts flame above the reddened East, he finds hosts on hosts of splendors like his own, only lesser as befitting such as have been lent their flame by him, standing wide-eyed, wondering, and



WATCHING
THE SUNSET

watching. And must the sun gladden a little at this sight, think you? When the great hulk of the solid world must be wakened by him, babes and birds and valleys and the distant gloom of foreboding mountains and the drifting tides of the wide sea and the more than tired multitudes of mothers asleep through the fatigue of love-watches many and severe and men tired nigh to death with labors manifold and the hushed quiet of the clover-beds fast asleep beyond the reach of dreams and anvils lying cold and bleak, untouched by one red link wherewith the brawny smith changes anvil to altar,—all asleep; but the sunflower awake and vigilant as sentinel upon the hills; and when the sun tries to slip past him to the waking of the world, the sunflower makes obeisance and salutes the king, and flashes golden shield full in the sun's face, saying wistfully, "We who are about to die, salute you;" and the sun smiles exultantly, and calls, "Morning!"

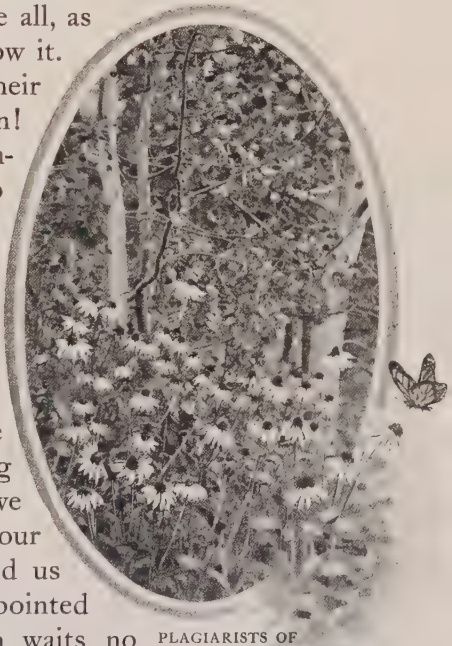
There may be those, and doubtless are, who think

slightingly of this royal flower. Things prevalent do not entice them. Only scarce things are precious. Gems are priceless because few. If they were as multitudinous as dewdrops' splendor, they would be, to them, cheap. With such slender souls I have no mood to argue. They are not worth while. They value the orchids because they are high-priced. Sunflowers will not beckon to these. They have no call to. Let them beckon to better folks.

Browning has things right when he talks of this bloom being

"Spread out like a sacrifice."

They belong to the sun. They are royal, not in their own right, but by the gift of him. So are we all, as for that; but the rest of us do not know it. They are wiser than we and better. Their fealty is wholesome. Lovers of the sun! Could a flower study out a finer performance in a whole flower lifetime? And to see, as the day marches on at the bidding of the sun, a wide field of sunflowers turn faces of radiant gold sunward, sunward, ever sunward, until when evening comes, and the sun, as if loath to bid his world good-night, lingers a little on the western slopes, a whole world of sunflowers watches his going with but a single eye, as to say, "Yours we are, and as you find us now, watching your setting, so on the morrow you shall find us watching your rising. We be the appointed watchers for the king." And the sun waits no longer; for he can not. Other shores wait for his sunrise. He must be gone. Sleeping isles are clamorous for dawn. And the sun is set; but these watchers for the sun are as just risen. Their eyes are sunlit; their faces



PLAGIARISTS OF THE SUNFLOWERS

radiant. They are a visible laughter. They do not mope. Clouded days can not dim their light; they do the rather increase it. On such days, when the sun is angry or grieved or incompetent, these viceroys think themselves held in his honor to flame for him and them; and their light fairly dazzles the eyes.

For myself, I love the sunflower. Nor is this told in privacy. I care not who knows it. Since as a lad I saw them flame along the ruts worn by prairie schooners in level prairies, and had no one to hint that those profuse fires were sacred and had bewilderments of beauty in them,—since then I have warmed my heart by their blaze, and have, in my blind way, exulted in them. To me they are not common flowers. They are uncommon flowers. No man with passion for cutting things down can cut a sunflower from my yard any more than he could cut down a mullein. These are sacred to one man's heart. They mind him of the light which lights the sun. Their quintescent radiance has legends of lights behind lights and dawns behind dawns,—the deathless, unlit dawns of God. A brave State has this flower for its device. The sunflower behaves well, graven on a shield. Its glory splashes on one's garments. Splendor, and to spare, is what the sunflower has a fondness for saying. Large giving does not make for loss. An entire prairie splashed or rimmed with this gorgeousness, and the sunflowers do not miss the light they lose. It is like laughter: the more we laugh, the more our laughters are increased. We gain by spending. Withal the sunflowers are something of moralists, though not prosaic

RELATIVES OF THE SUNFLOWER

A SUNFLOWER FOREST

ones, and never bores. They burn, a happy, wasteless splendor, the forget-me-nots of the sun.

They are frontiersmen. I like them for that. More, I bless them for that. They are flowering hardihoods. They like the company of pioneers. The mover's wagon makes them giggle; and a camper's fire makes them laugh out loud. They are not dwellers in kings' houses. They riot with the ill-clad and the poor and the eaters of corn-bread baked in the ashes. They are proud of those who move West, and want to be counted of their company. They like hard times. Think of that. Most folks growl at hard times. I have heard them, so that this remark is no hearsay. It is too authentic. But sunflowers delight to grow where nothing else wants to. The hard roadside is their pet pleasure. They will grow in kindlier regions, but not by wish. Hard times suit them. They never lie down, so hard beds they know nothing of; and standing up, they like good footing; but there they are anyhow,—up, tall, and radiant, and on the borders. They like out-doors. They want prairie-room. They want sky-room and stand all heights from the knee-high to a child to the tallness of a ranger on horseback. They constitute the plumes of this Western knighthood; and right regal they are.

Sunflowers are masculine gender. This is not said in disrespect to the feminines, but out of self-respect to the masculines. Most flowers are feminine gender. Their winsome weeness, loveliness, delicacy, fragility, are such

SUNLIT

bequests as come to womanhood. A rose is like some queenly woman, and a violet like some woman of unobtrusive loveliness, a lily like stately women we have met and remembered; but sunflowers are men-flowers, rude, ungainly, coarse-garmented, brawny, naked-armed, unafraid of wind, rain, sunburn, fierce heats, freckles, unware of complexion, giving no heed to finery, garmented in a stout suit of Kendal green, and growing lusty as fields of corn. Virile is the word which applies itself to them. A weed

LOOKING FOR THE SUNFLOWERS

this plant looks till it blooms out into tumultuous gold; and then all the world could answer, here was a flower.

And a forest of sunflowers, every limb wearing its flame, which blows not out with any gales of wind, but wags indolently as doing so not out of necessity but out of preference,—than such a forest what has more glory? It is as if a forest were on fire, only with a genial flame, and not with such as turns cities into ashes and dreariness of desolation.

And they are far-seen flowers. Across wide prairies, along some invisible wagon-road, these proud glories lift up their golden banners like an army unafraid and on the

march; and they march on and on, miles, miles, and miles, with footstep never flagging, with banners never drooping nor sullied, with joy that looks as if it would lift itself into a song on any moment, and cries of tumultuous triumph. It is easier to keep heart when sunflowers are around. Their gladness and aggressiveness are a contagion hard to keep from catching. They are nobodies to the unthinking many; but this is insignificant to them. They are out of doors: they are fronting dawns, noons, sunsets, and then dawns again: they are sufficient for themselves. they are having good times: they are giving heart to somebody: they are gathering the dust of long roadways on their green garments: they are growing, with scant thanks to the rain-cloud: they are growing in the swirls of the hot winds, and matching their fire with fire: they are unaware of impediments and aware of the sun and the earth and the call of the winds and the vision of the prairies, and so grow tall and glorious, and radiant as joy, and beautiful as new-mined gold and bewildering as a multitude.

Sunflower, I love thee. May thy gold never fade nor diminish and may smiles stay bright upon thy face while this world lasts! Hail to thee, brave lover of the sun!

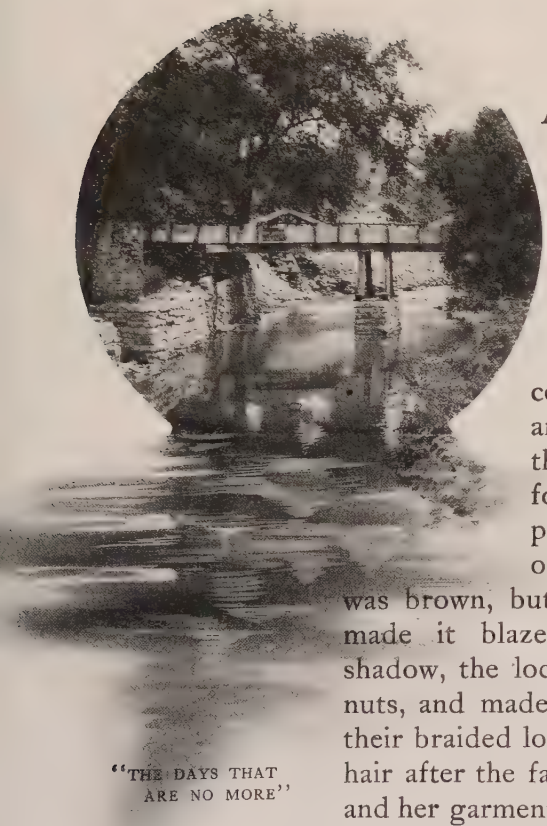
THEY WISH THEY WERE SUNFLOWERS

THE PASSING OF AUTUMN

AT SUMMER NOON

MELANCHOLY

THE PASSING OF AUTUMN



"THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE"

AUTUMN was walking out alone, with a crown of golden leaves set lightly on her brow. I strained my eyes to see from what tree she had plucked her garland, but was scarcely near enough to determine with certainty; but from their size and rare tawniness I guessed them to be tulip-leaves, which for golden beauty have no partners in all the companies of autumnal leafage. Her hair was brown, but so that a sudden sunburst made it blaze; but, passing again into shadow, the locks were brown as dried walnuts, and made my hands anxious to caress their braided loveliness. She had bound her hair after the fashion of the Greek maidens; and her garments hung like a Greek maiden's garment, bewitching for grace. Her arms were bare; and on her left wrist she wore a bracelet woven of the dulled splendor of wheat; and she was cinctured (not tightly as with a lover's arm, but loosely as in sheer indolence) with a crimson girdle wrought of leaves from the ivy vines that twist trees about with their glow as of lin-

gering sunsets. On her breast hung long, swaying tendrils of bindweed and smilax:—the one with its gentle green and exquisite shape; the other with its green, vivid as if it had been kissed by the lips of Springtime not a moment before. Her garment (and I, not being a woman, can not in reason be asked to tell its texture; such knowledge is too wonderful for me; all a man can undertake to say concerning any woman's garment is that it seemed meant for her and became her as a thing of course) was in color like the rusty gold of shocked corn; and the garment was mobile, caressing her fair form as a wind caresses a rose-garden, and seemed, as she moved, undulant as a wave. Her garment was hemmed with gold braid made from the heavy heads of wheat, and wrought as by rare needle-work; and the vesture was figured with Autumn leaves of all shrubs and trees, so cunningly wrought as to seem a-falling each from the branch whereon it grew, and in the air eddying to the earth as in no haste to reach it.

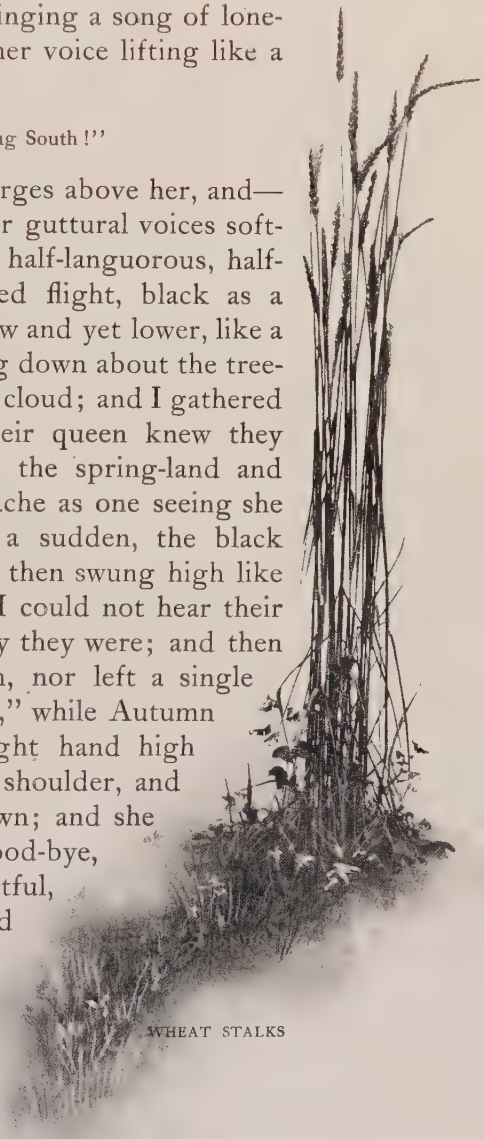
Her face I can not tell of, though I looked at it wistfully. All I then saw, and now know, was that the face was full of sorrow as of a woman whose lover has been long delayed in his returning from the wars—a face full of pathos and pleading. And as she walked I thought I heard her sob. Her head was a-droop like a wearied flower, so that I wished I might hold it on my shoulder as a lover would; and she was so alone. She walked thus down the road thick with Autumn dust, and down lower on the hill where the corn-husker can be seen loading his wagon with the husked corn yellow as sunflowers in full bloom, while his horses lunch off of the corn-blades when they can not get at the corn-ears; and the dog goes in his long detours to sight a rabbit, and runs panting after the shrewd little scalawag, who beats him in the race and dodges him at the brier-patch; and the farmer is whistling softly to himself as from a happy heart, a thing good to hear. And there, too, the black-birds are talking all at

once, with voices pitched to the key of a guttural unmusical and yet musical music; and, seeing them, Autumn lifted her eyes, and they were full of tears.

And she sang a song whose words I could not wholly hear, since she sang softly and sometimes in whispers, and her tears spilled into her words; but the temper of her song I quite understood. She was singing a song of loneliness and longing; and by and by, her voice lifting like a sob rising in the heart, I understood

"O blackbirds, blackbirds, flying South!"

and the blackbirds swung in black surges above her, and—as she sang in sobbing cadences, their guttural voices softened their asperities and took on a half-languorous, half-tender melody, and their close-ranked flight, black as a cloud of gathering storm, dropped low and yet lower, like a cloud of black mist on a night settling down about the tree-tops, until they enveloped her in their cloud; and I gathered that they knew their queen, and their queen knew they were training for the long flight to the spring-land and the sun-lit South; and she had heartache as one seeing she was to be forsaken. Then, all of a sudden, the black music clomb the sky in a long spiral, then swung high like the mad wave of a stormy sea, until I could not hear their incongruous voices, so far up the sky they were; and then they drifted South swiftly and high, nor left a single loiterer behind, and "fainter onward," while Autumn stood motionless, and lifted her right hand high till her garment slipped back to the shoulder, and her fair arm shone white as early dawn; and she waved the flitting, winged cloud good-bye, and stood—her eyes so wistful, *so* wistful, as one who stands upon the pier and strains eyes to see the last sweet sight of a lover going on a departing, distant ship.



WHEAT STALKS

And it was in my heart to speak to her, but dare not lest I affright her; and, once more, she who had ceased singing began again softly, softly—

"Soft and low, soft and low"—

and rose imperceptibly to herself till I caught her meaning and words together. She was singing words a sweet poet had written for her, though till then I knew not it was for sad Autumn he had written them. So she sang in a voice tremulous and tearful,—

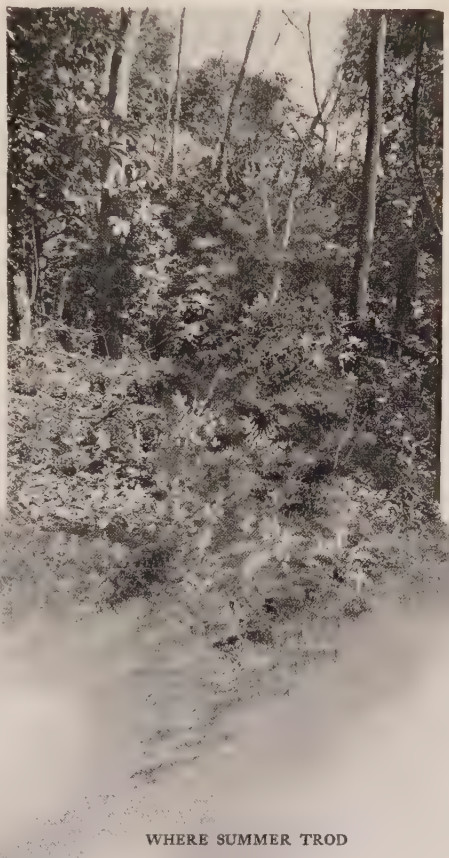
"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes
In looking on the happy Autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark Summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more."

It was pitiful to hear and very sweet, just as it is pitiful and sweet to hear a woman sobbing. Her plaintive voice fitted the plaintive verses; and she had set the words to music of her own, and yet a tune I felt I had heard somewhere, though, at the time she sang, I could not tell when and where, but afterwards recalled it was the music the sea makes on deserted shores at evening, and the wind makes on November nights among the leafless trees when it is raining.

So Autumn walked, not as seeing, but as hearing. She was like a blind girl walking, paying no heed but going not amiss. She walked past the golden-rod which had lost its gold splendor but not its shapeliness; and past the sunflowers lolling a little as sleeping gondoliers in Venice on the shining sea; and past where vines tangled, blurred with the blue-black of the wild grape; and on where

sumacs flamed their startling scarlets on you, and on, where the rabbit scampered into the brier-thicket as even afraid of her (such silly fear the rabbits know; their very bravery is cowardice); and up the long winding road taking its own time and own way to the hilltop; and then, when seeming to mean nothing other than to climb the hill to its wooded and lovely top, she turned aside into a thicket of weeds taller than a man on horseback, and I lost sight of her, but knew she was still restless in wandering, hearing her trampling the dry weeds under her naked feet; for I had noted that Autumn walked barefoot as I had seen Summer do, though it had been told me by such as loved to wander in dim Autumn woods and through remote fields, where the solitude held its quiet, free from the oft intrusions of mankind, that they had seen this sweet recluse wearing sandals made from grasses grown in deep ravines; and I had not for a moment doubted those lush, growing grasses would make apt covering for a fair woman's feet; but as I have told, when mine eyes saw Autumn she walked barefoot as Rebecca coming to the well where Abraham's steward waited, praying he might find a woman meet in grace and beauty to be Isaac's wife:— down through tall weeds brown as an Indian's cheek; on and on, till she came



WHERE SUMMER TROD

to the wood's edge once more, where grew the last of the purple asters in tattered but jaunty flower; and further, where walnuts, half black, half green, strewed the ground, making odors better to lovers of the woods than costly perfumes, whereat she stopped and stooped and gathered a handful (her left hand), and, lifting them, inhaled their breath as if she were smelling white clovers in a June field, whereupon I was glad, because myself had done the like through many years, and who is the man not glad to have his pet judgment verified and certified by a lovely woman?

But as I have told, so Autumn did, and, smelling the walnuts, walked deep into the woods, all but leafless now; for walnut-trees had never a leaf, and the hickories would now and then let fall a straying yellow leaf; and she waded ankle-deep in this Autumn stream of withered foliage. Up and down she walked amid the rustling leaves sweet-scented as cinnamon groves and musical as the happy human voice; up and down she waded through these delicious leaves, as a child might wade in the clear waters of a little brook; and so walking, she, to my gladness and surprise, laughed out loud, and sang sweetly and joyfully, like a bobolink's rollicking song, and as I have heard the brown thrush in the green hedgerow. She sat down and leaned against a walnut trunk, dark and beautiful, and tossed the leaves about with her tanned hands, and when she heard the squirrel chatter from a leafless redbud near at hand, she laughed again with a silvern laughter good for a man's heart to hear, so that I quite forgot that I had heard her sobbing. She, watching the squirrel, held a walnut toward him, and he came down from the redbud, and scampered through the rustling leaves, and sat in her lap, and chattered jocosely as if he were her friend for ages, and took the walnut from her hand and then fell asleep, and she covered him up with leaves. And I knew her to be Queen of the Autumn. With the squirrel asleep, and her hands lying idly, she sang, only I knew not the words nor music;

and she watched the blue sky crossed with branches soft as etcher's lines, and marked the goings of the clouds, and seemed as in a dream while she saw the smoke-puffs and trailings of the cirrus clouds, so remote and graceful that all attempts to tell of them must end in failure.

ACROSS THE LONELY HILLS

And the sun was hurrying as one belated, and cowbells, homeward going, were making music across the woodland, and some lads were scurrying across the fields with bravos of laughter; and Autumn smiled as remembering her brothers. And the crows were cawing homeward with much babble and brotherliness; when, without any warning whatsoever, a wild wind sprang out of the North, and the leaves were scattered every whither like timid sheep, and the squirrel, lying asleep near Autumn's hand, woke with a start, and went scurrying with the wild drifting of the leaves; and columns of gray clouds drove wildly across the sky, and the light dimmed as in no mood for further shining, and the sun forgot to show his kindly face; and on a sudden came dull, gray evening, though the hour for evening was not yet; and the wild winds made mad music in the tree-tops, which writhed under the fury of its lashings and sobbed like the melancholy sea.

Autumn sprang up and stood quivering, with face from which all light had faded; and her cheek was white as a dead man's face, and her lips were parted as ready to answer to a call, and there came a wilder gust and a rush of Autumn rain drenched the sky; and I thought I heard a wild-bird flying high in the midst of tempests, calling drearily; but she heard and laughed like a June morning, and called with a voice of music very wonderful, "I am coming, beloved, coming!" and tottered so that I ran to stay her from falling, and clasped her to find in my arms and hands only a garment of dull gold, like rusty corn-shocks, and at my feet a scattered wheat-sheaf, with beaded heads like beaten gold.

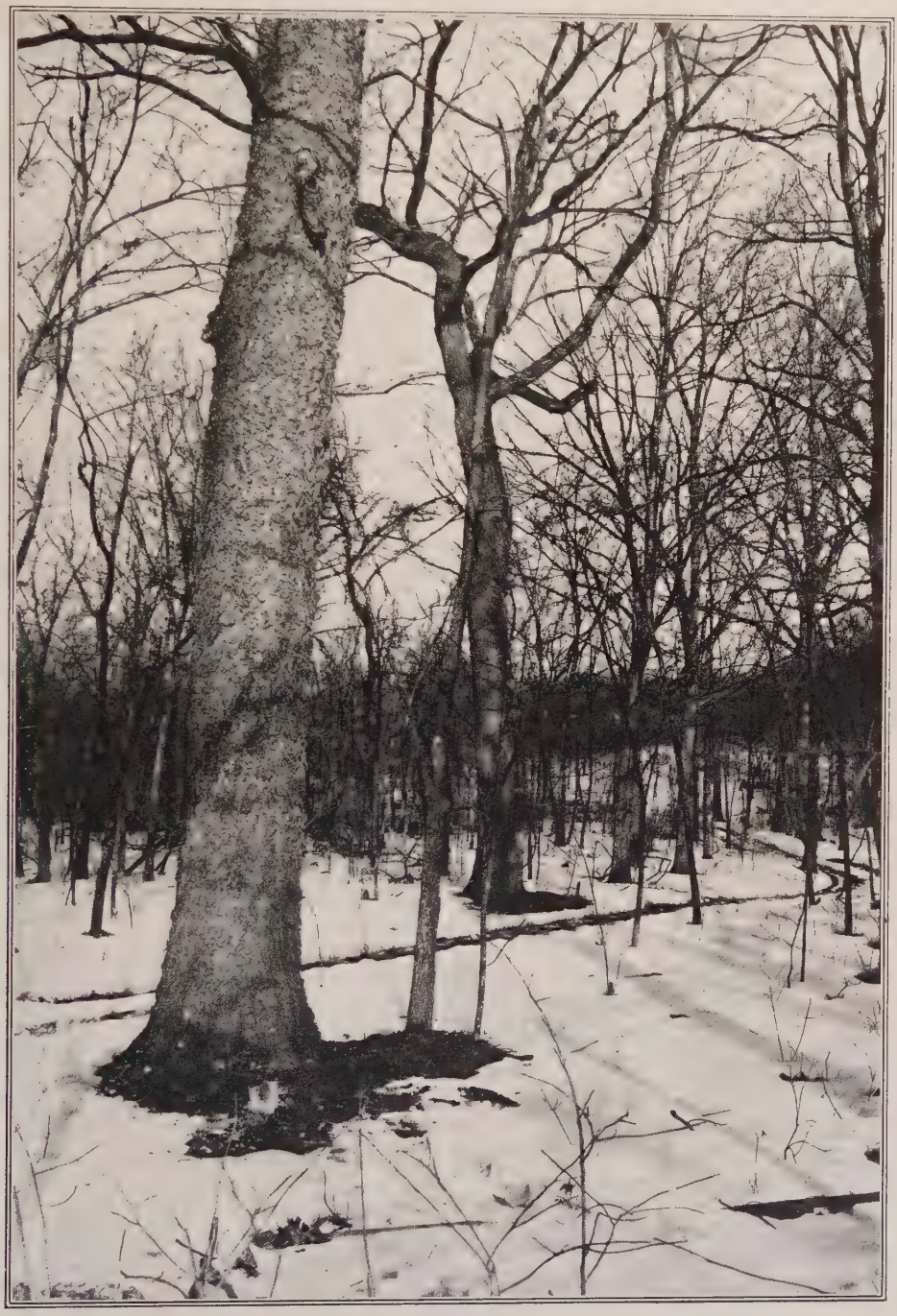
And the gray sky became pitiless, and rains drenched fields and woods and me; and darkness murk and utter came down suddenly, so that in going I stumbled as one blind through the bleak darkness, while rain and wind swished through the naked trees, and the lone wind surged through the blackness like the long surge along a rocky shore, and the rains drowned the withered leaves, and an owl whined piteously through the rainy glooms, and far across the wooded hills a sweet church-bell called.

And Autumn was ended and Winter had begun. And I held in my hands a dripping garment of old gold wrought into devices of forest-leaves.

THE SHEAF OF WHEAT

TREE PILLARS

THE GATEWAY OF COFFEEBEAN PILLARS



A HACKBERRY PILLAR

TREE PILLARS

UNDAUNTED

EVERYTHING man makes is patterned after something God makes. Men are imitators: God is the only inventor. One of the most beautiful things man's hand has fashioned is the pillar. Nothing else so combines beauty and strength and utility and sublimity. To look on one of those Doric columns, whose unadorned simplicity challenged and challenges the plaudits of the world, is to feel the wonder of architecture. What long-dead builder hewed the first marble or granitic pillar, and set it up as a sign of what his dream and hand conspired to do for a memorial to grace and utility? We can not guess; and no record remains. Nor are we much the losers by this lack. He hewed the pillar, and set it on its base, and gave room for capital and architrave. This is the essential fact: all things beside are subsidiary. We mostly care that a fine service is rendered. Who rendered it is interesting but unessential detail. As we love our benefactors, we wish to know these race helpers so as to dwell upon their names in grateful remembrance; but their service praises them whosoever they be. Some builder executed

the first column; and since then, in marble, granite, brass, iron, porphyry, gray cathedral stone, pillars have multiplied till they have become a company incredible for multitude, yet never seen but to be wondered at and rejoiced in. For myself, to steadfastly regard noble columns is like attending high festival. I love their proportion, their stateliness, their massiveness, which know to hold on high a temple's roof or an amphitheater's lofty front. I am enamored of the spectacle. The slender pillar, with not a drop of sweat exuding, nor any moan, nor any sign of effort, with not a stoop to tell it is an Atlas holding up a sky, stands a symbol of might and youth outlasting centuries of years. And this slender pillar grips the imagination, and will not let it go. It is imperial. The name of Cæsar is not more regal.

Where was it some old builder learned this lesson, this lithe stability, this might refusing to bow down beneath any burden? Was his the divine force of creation as the building of the sky? Far from that. His was the divine

THROUGH WINTER WOODS

gift of imitation, of vision and reproduction. As Brunelleschi beheld the dome of heaven and dared to reproduce it for a cathedral roof, and did it in such exultant fashion as that it still remains the wondered-at delight of many generations, so he who fashioned some uncouth quarry-piece into a pillar, saw a tree-trunk spring from the brown mold and bear its boscage royally aloft, and from that tree-trunk fashioned his good design. The pillar is tree-trunk turned into stone. God invented the pillar: man copied it. Let anybody stand in the serene presence of a winter forest, where trees are grown to manhood and their bulks lift in varied and imposing symmetry—stand and look at their brave boles lift themselves on high—and ask himself how differs this sight from the fashion of columns in the temple of the Acropolis, save that in the temple the pillars stood in decorous orderliness, while in the temple of the woods the pillars stood in glorious disorder, the rank growths of fruitful soil enriched with centuries of withered and fallen leaves. "The groves were God's first temples," where the shadow and the comfort of the roof where moaned the tireless music of the nomad winds, were held aloft by stately pillars of oak and pine and ash and sycamore and elm and tulip and cottonwood, and sometimes by the Jachin and Boaz of the redwood of far-famed Yosemite. With this architectural aspect of the trees this writing has to do—the pillars of the trees.

If any one will walk through a wide woodland, casting eyes upon the tree-trunks as they lift themselves on high, expressions of spontaneous force very heartening to think upon, limiting his look to that part of the trunk reaching to just below the arm-pits of the first branches, that one will see what this writer means by tree pillars, and will have a vision as if he had strayed among the forgotten pillars of ancient, dispeopled temples.

And it is worthy of regard how many aspects a forest has. We shall not compass a landscape of trees all at once.

A GRAY CATHEDRAL PILLAR

One thing at once is nature's rule from which it is hard to deviate. I have often tried to get the complete impression of a summer or winter forest, holding to the particulars so that each should stand in its own dignity, abating nothing of its claim, and get the meaning of the whole besides, and have ever found the effort futile. I would get the tree in its totality by omitting the particulars, in part. The whole is scarcely a conjunction of parts, rather a subordination of parts. The tree is the parts conceived as in a picture; and when we go to reproduce the tree in our thoughts, we do so by separating part and part, and by holding up to view those varied arborescent inclusions which constitute the completed wonder of a forest tree. For instance, I have a picture given to me by a dear friend, a picture painted by an artist whose specialty is sunsets. He paints nothing besides. Often, on dark days, when clouds have hung above and about my heart like funereal banners, I go and stand and glow with and in this

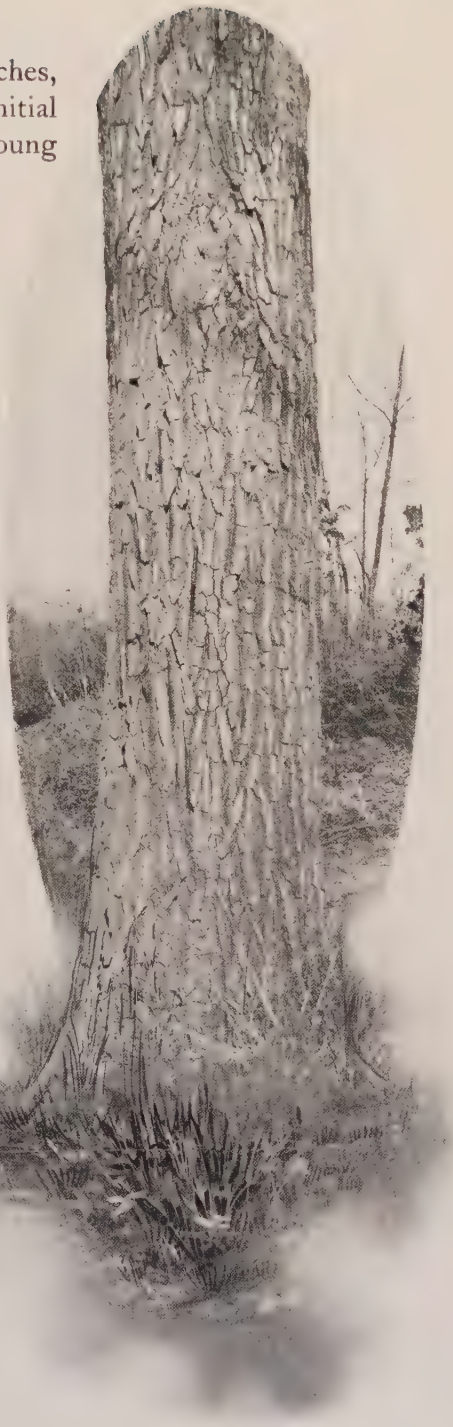
sunset. There glows the sky, wine-colored and pink like the glow of a woman's cheek a-blushing, clouds dappled with varied splendors, high skies tinted as by a memory of setting suns, still higher skies dimming toward shadows which swim up the eastern heavens, waters of a stream flashed with the wonder of the glowing sky where the burning clouds are caught and held as in prolonged conflagration—a spring evening bonfire lighted by the playful hands of children. But have you not noted that the one thing I could catch was sunset? Particulars stepped out one by one as I waited before the picture. Sunset splendor was what the picture's quintessence meant; but the picture detail may, yet the same, have emphasis of its own. In the picture are cattle roving in the meadows edging the stream, and a bank lifting above the waters tilting a trifle, and a road straying among the trees; beside a pool a tree of solid greenery, as if it were green rock, and on the lifting hill a brawn oak flinging out long, masterful arms, and then many trees crowding along as to keep the road company to save it from loneliness,—those are in the picture, and much more. When my heart is weary I watch the pathetic glow of the sunset. When I am weary of city streets crowded with houses, I watch the trees, cool and enticing and oblivious to cities and their inhabitants. When my feet are tired tramping hard pavements, I rest them by looking at the woodland road going leisurely, I know not where. When tired of city sounds, I rest me listening to the long-drawn breath of the wind through sunset tree-tops. Has this not become apparent, how the picture must be seen by parts to get its breadth of meaning out? So narrow a landscape as a painter's canvas can not be grasped in a single hand. Apply this experience to seeing a tree; and the analogy will be felicitous.

I have observed in myself how I always watch a tree with regard to some single thing. Sometimes it is for a bird's nest, at which times the entire turn of limbs and

A HICKORY PILLAR

flow of branches and columnar beauty of the trunk are adjustments from which an oriole may swing her nest. Sometimes the thing I watch for is the poise of tree-tops, the carriage of the tree, so to say, with what variations the varying species of the forest flood a space of the sky with their gifts of form and grace, comparing the turning of the branch of the ill-bred catalpa with his lubberliness, with the delicious delicacy of elm branchlets and willow wands or how the cotton-wood sends out branches like things grown in perfect calm. At other times I watch the tracery of long expanses of woodland topmost naked branches as if they were embroideries wrought on the turquoise garment of the sky; and the sight is very good for the eyes. This is witching business. The grace of tree branchlets flung out on the sky is one of God's rarest expressions of beauty. You can not tire of watching; and they will not tire of you. That is a mercy. The never-ending series of original combinations, of cross and re-cross of branches larger and lesser, quite gets the upper hand of me. In particular is this a thing to indulge in when your train is running at a breakneck, breathless speed among branching forests, and the sky so becomes hemmed with the bewildering beauty of forest embroidery. What hilarious hours I have spent thus while my train leaped fast as Bucephalus! At other times my thought has been fast-

ened to the spring of the branches, watching how limbs took their initial leap out into the sky, like a young eagle's tentative spring,—this limb leap which differentiates tribe from tribe among the trees. Then sometimes it is the corrugations of bark. I watch, stand, and wonder at the different great-coats, folk of the forest wear to keep the gelid Winter out. And so full of wonder is the sight that I never weary of it. There is ever a breathlessness as of haste in my looks as I scan seamed barks, and wonder if trees grow weary like the hands of men; for with trees all garments are hand-made and hand-woven. Every tree must make his own clothes, only some old mother of them all schooled each tribe in the appropriate weaving and wearing. The birch weaves its garments so that they are like rare enamel: the hickory cares for a smooth nap, till each tree seems dressed in tights; and the Norway pine wears garments hued like human flesh; and blackberries have clothing like the flush of health on a boy's cheek in winter; and the ash wears Scotch tweeds, rough but comely; and the wild cherry has garments like some royal cavalier,

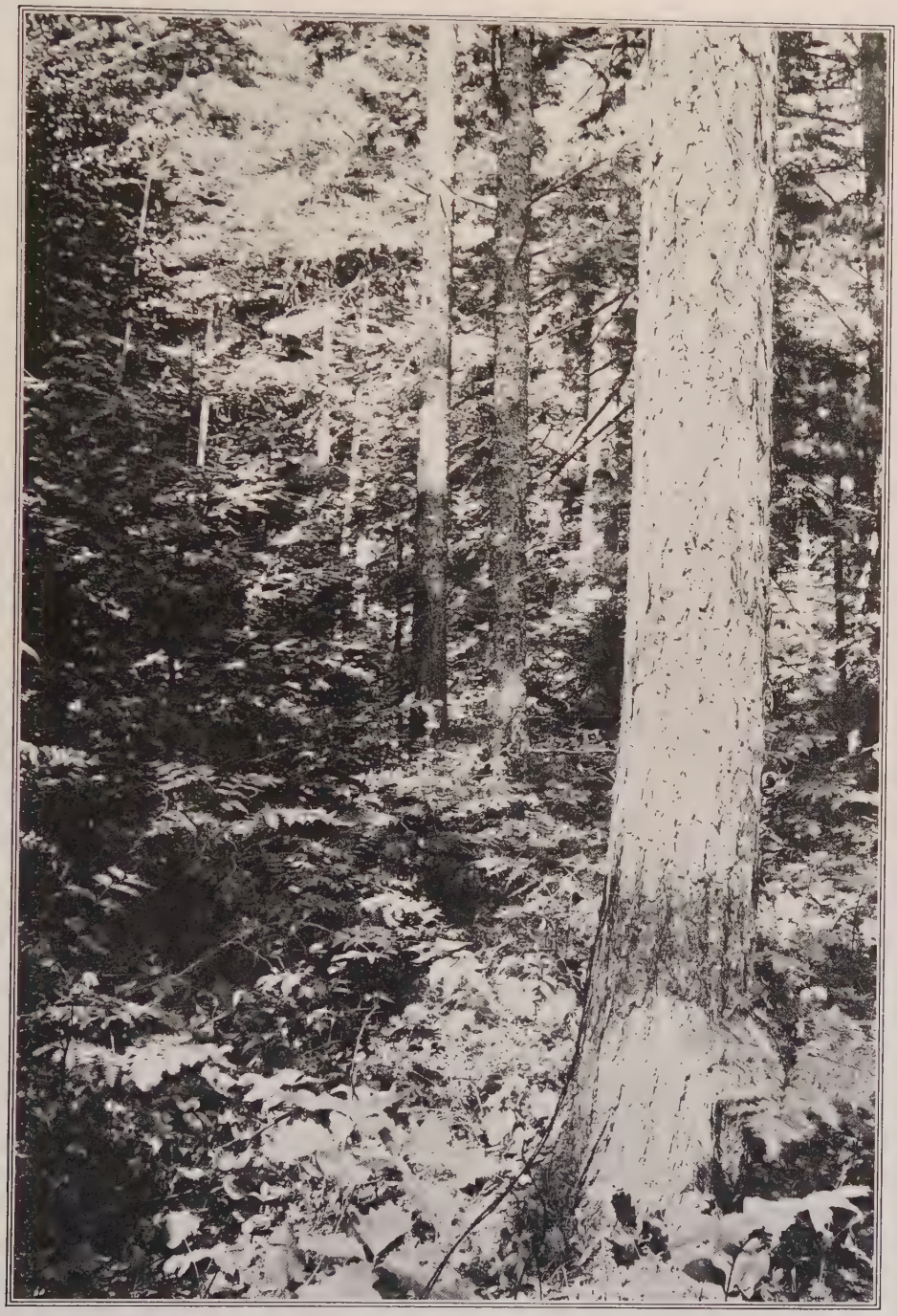


THE COTTONWOOD PILLAR

only faded a little from long wear,—sometimes this garmenting of the trees I give heed to.

But now, my look is at the pillared majesty of them, to conceive each tree as if it were a pillar hewn to hold a temple up. I am glad to have hit upon this another method of interpreting trees to myself; for in it is much of joy and elucidation. The tree's royalty has become more apparent, and his individuality more pronounced. If a lens could only give the rich colorings of those pillars which are here attempted to be interpreted, I would be glad. But that remains for the eye which hunts these tree pillars out as they stand, stately and grand, in the woods where their life is lived. Eyes are the only competent artists, after all. They can see all: tint, corrugation, hugeness, sense of infinite strength, unsullied repose, stability,—eyes can catch all these. Tree pillars are not to be seen in a book, but in a forest; only this is to be remembered, that something of gain comes in carrying a pillar away from its forest surroundings, and setting it up as a column of remembrance far from its fellows. In this created solitude we watch it with an intimacy of regard we had not given it hitherto. Would you care to watch pillars set up, which, had they stood in a temple portico, had enraptured the world of such as love things majestical?

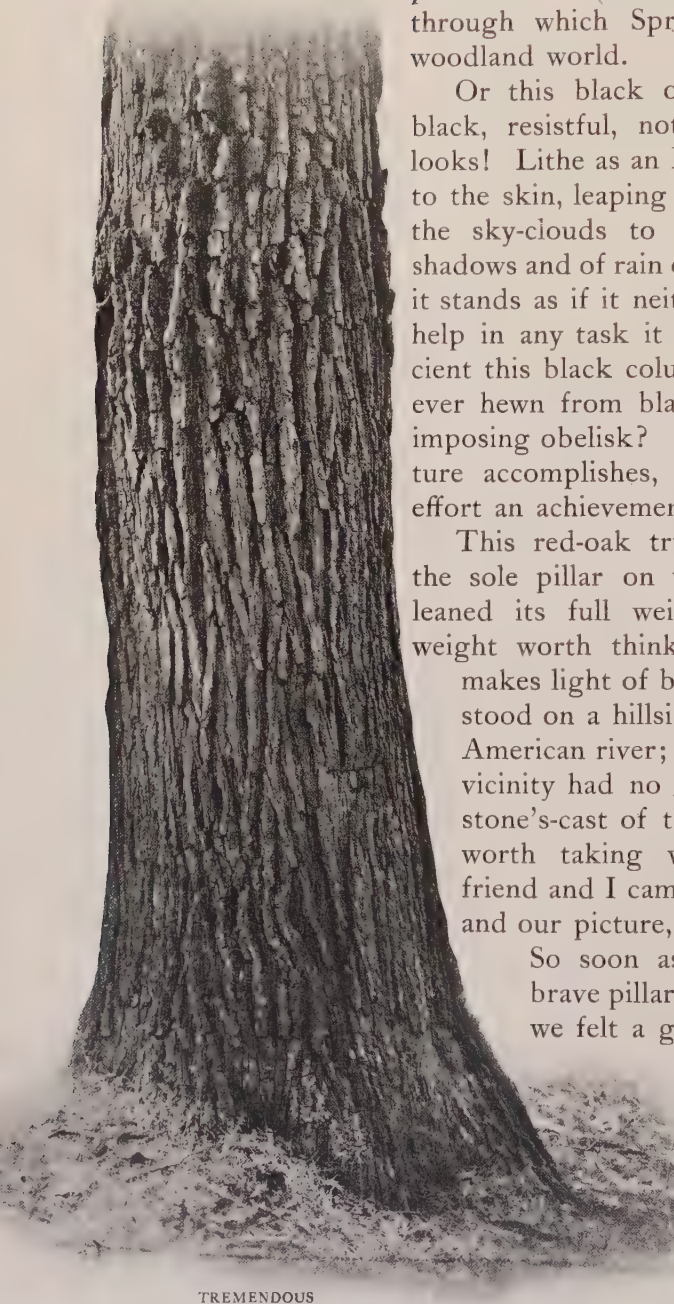
Stately and strong as are pillars I have seen in Gothic cathedrals, pillars unafraid of the roof-weight leaning on them, and sinewy to bear their burden as never knowing there was a burden to be borne, I never have seen those Gothic pillars of gray cathedral stone half so imposing as tree pillars. Or what caryatid, holding up some Grecian frieze, could be named in beauty with this slender and engaging column of the coffee-bean tree? That ragged trunk solid as stone, and at some turns of invective-looking bark, red as a burning coal, garments in nothing set loose like those of the shagbark but ribbed as if the tree were a crusader clad in coat of mail,—that trunk, panoplied



THE PINE PILLAR

against all battle stress, would make a pilaster to dream of with eyes shut on dusky summer evenings. For airy grace and manly strength in fine and inspiring combination, artists would go very far to find the half equal of this pillar taken from the ordinary woods, and yet a thing of beauty of which hardly any one this writer has ever known has had any knowledge of at all. But had some long-fled builder left in that woods a carven column, tall and slim as a sylph or a woman, people would have pilgrimed to observe it. And to recall how, on a day of waking spring, when earth-smells were everywhere, and the glad redbird called in notes eager and insistent and full of all the gladsome hope of the morning of the year, and grasses were shooting up tender spears of glistening green beside the winding water, and the sky was dim as beckoning the rain, and foliage was trying to break through the harsh impediment of bark because by some unknown prescience it knew the gentle Spring was come, our friend, the artist, came, and took this picture when we felt we heard the life-saps flowing through the watercourses of the trees, and felt sure we heard the dryads calling each to the other, "Spring! Spring!" And this tree, slate-gray black with sudden breaking out of flame as of hidden fire at the heart of the trunk, stood a

A BLACK OAK PILLAR



TREMENDOUS

pillar fit to have held up the gateway through which Spring might enter this woodland world.

Or this black oak pillar, how bleak, black, resistful, not to say resentful, it looks! Lithe as an Indian runner stripped to the skin, leaping skyward as if to urge the sky-clouds to lean their weight of shadows and of rain on its waiting strength, it stands as if it neither asked nor needed help in any task it undertook. Self-sufficient this black column is; and was there ever hewn from black basalt cliff a more imposing obelisk? Such daring deeds Nature accomplishes, nor even thinks the effort an achievement.

This red-oak trunk might have been the sole pillar on which a massive roof leaned its full weight nor guessed the weight worth thinking of. Such brawn makes light of burdens. This red-oak stood on a hillside overlooking a great American river; and the people of the vicinity had no appreciation that at a stone's-cast of their doors was a thing worth taking voyages to see. My friend and I came far to get our vision and our picture, but came not too far.

So soon as we set eyes on this brave pillar from the winter woods we felt a glow of gladness which made the shivery winter wind grow warm; and we laughed aloud as if we had discovered a pillar standing amidst the ruins of

some desolated temple, and called each to the other, "Eureka!"

I have seen tulip pillars, straight as a line swung from the sun, leap seventy-five feet with never a branch flung out like an arm stretched to keep one from falling—a glad, unassisted leap skyward. What temple would not be elate if such a column held its roof? This tree appeals to me as one of the noblest pillars of the wood; and if a temple like the Parthenon could be erected in which these tulip pillars would be used in long corridors of columns seventy-five to one hundred feet in altitude to hold on high a roof of snowy marble, could there be a nobler edifice? But when Winter pitches his glorious camp, and snows are everywhere, and every tree leans under its cross of snow, what hinders a forest of tulip-trees from being such a stately Parthenon as I have conceived? This is Nature's prowess, that she executes what fancy pictures as dreams. What mightier than any Parthenon have mine own eyes beheld at winter amongst the tulip-trees?

Or if these black, corrugated trunks appeared less apt than marble to build temples of, then from forest pillars build a Parthenon of snow-white marble, using sycamores for columns. Snows of mountain crest are not more glistering white than these; Pentelic marbles are not more gloriously beautiful. The columnar leap of marble quarried from the earth-mold with the miracle of soundless quarrying until along the skeleton woodland a hundred columns lift them, straight as the direction of falling light and white as light filtered free from earth dust,—than this, not since the making of the world has temple been so lordly and sublime. Or if your imagination take the Greek turn and you prefer to paint your Parthenon pillars, let the sycamore be suffused with gentle emerald such as is accustomed to tint it when saps begin their journey from rootlet to topmost thrust of twig tufted with a bulging bud, and when buds softly flutter into leaf, young, vivid in their

A SYCAMORE PILLAR

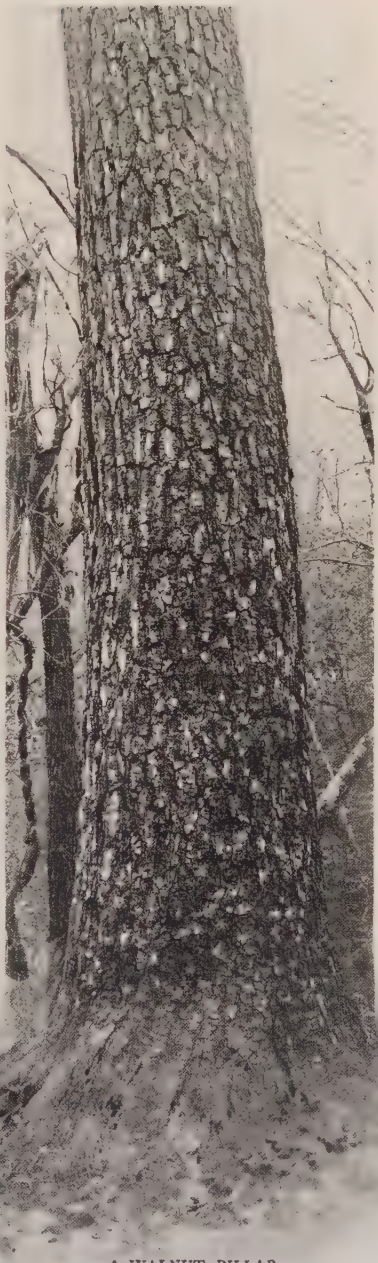
flush of green; and these trees uphold a temple roofed with emerald quarried from God's hidden mines, only, instead of the trivial emerald worn for a green petal in a woman's ring, this emerald is in great slabs like onyx fetched from far; and when the suffused and gentle green of sycamore pillars upholds a roof of springtime early leafage, all painted Parthenons have found their queen, and must bow down to do homage.

Or if your architectural preference lean toward the colossal, and you wish builders to erect a Luxor or Karnak temple, then choose the walnut trunk for making of your pillars. Look at this huge-girthed trunk in the picture until you feel its mass, and answer whether any builder, however finical as to material for the colossal, could ask to find a quarry where lordlier pillars were to be hewn. This walnut campanile has drunk in the dusks and dawns and starlights and hot noons for a full century, and stands imposing as a reminiscence of those titanic builders who contrived those massive grandeurs of Old Luxor's colonnades.

And sometimes, when the ax has made mad havoc among

the sycamores, I have seen acres littered with marble pillars, as if some desolating tempest had swept across the world or some volcanic upheaval had tossed a temple into ruins and flung broken columns in wild heterogeneity across that landscape formerly rendered significant by an imposing temple watching for the coming of the dawn; but royal wreckage, and what a fateful catastrophe! Though never ruined temples with their disheveled beauty were so pathetic and wonderful as this sycamore forest wounded to its death! In death or life these tree pillars are so soaked with poetry and eloquence and sublimity.

Or if another preference chose another temple architect, then he might quarry pillars of Norway pine, tall, indecrepit, erect as brawny soldiers, colored with a glowing warmth like to human flesh, stately, passing noble, and roofed with the black greens of pine foliage as if night were dawning on the tree-tops and this roof were an orchestra which played subdued and witching music. Than such, no worshiper might wish other singing at his hour of prayer. What thoughts have swept across my heart when I have in solitariness worshiped in the solemn Gothic cathedral of the pines, and heard this divine orchestral melody melt from the sky! Earth has no more impressive edifice nor

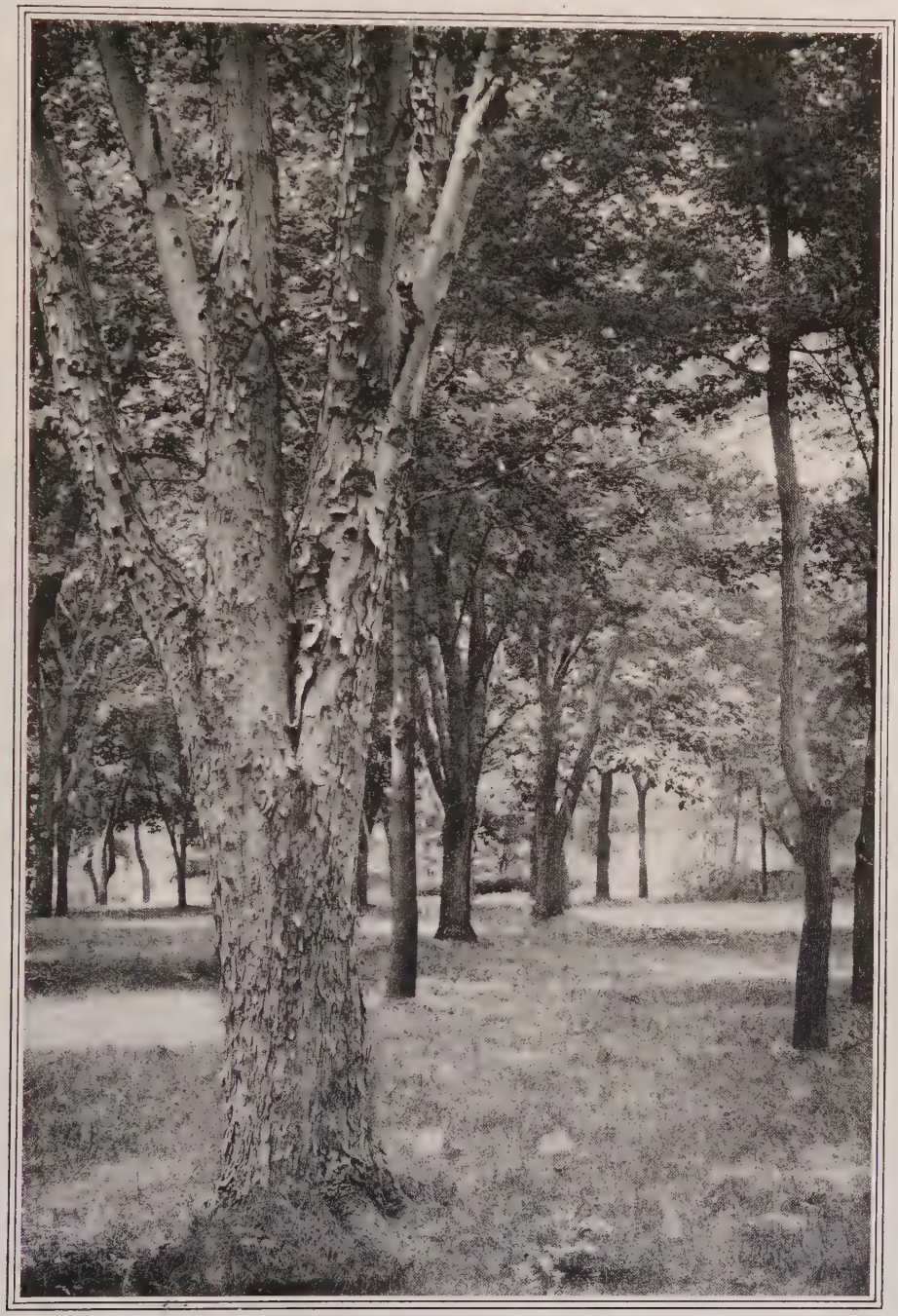


A WALNUT PILLAR

THE SHAGBARK PILLAR

more expressive service; for it plunges the soul into the very surf of prayer.

And if a house were to be built for Anger to dwell in, what could be quarried from the hills so expressive or just, so without contrast but so replete with likeness of spirit and its expression, as the shagbark? With a house built of such materials, Anger might rave as the rude Winter wind to find his house as angry as himself. This shagbark pillar was taken in his surly strength when behind and beside it Springtime wood, leaf, and flower swung perfume censer to every wind that blew; when blue-birds called in voice swooning with tenderness, "ber-mu-da, ber-mu-da;" when robins fluted and the dove moaned, while all the earth beside sang, drunk with gladness, and when the landscape was bathed in sunlight as in a sea, and leaves laughed out loud in merry-making; when the buds of the shagbark had swollen in growth of Spring till they flowered out into a bud, red as a garnet and as beautiful, and then hasted from bud to leaf:—but for all this gladness and beauty of the year, for all the swinging of the trees so that this picture has a Corot effect, the shagbark refuses to be glad and bears on high its tossing crest of laughing and

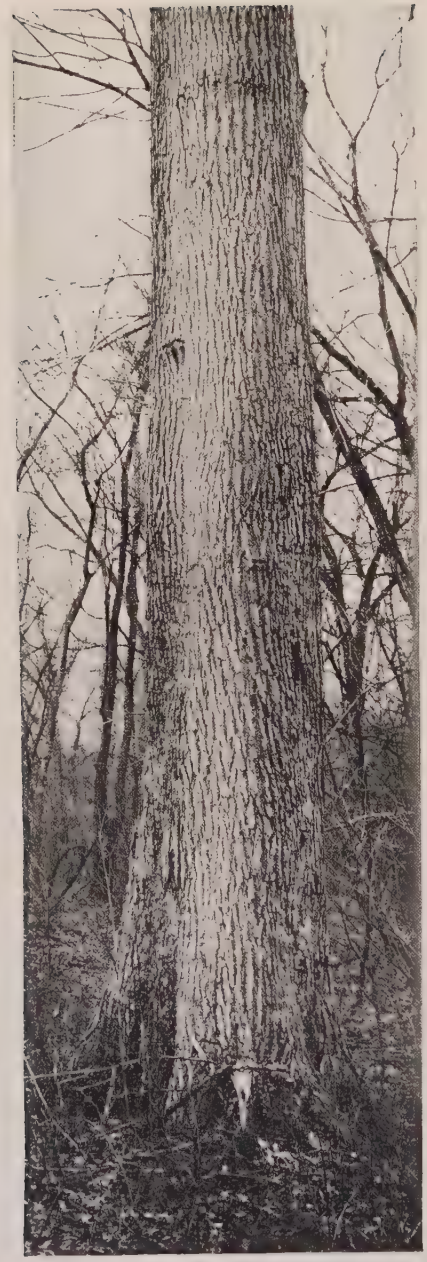


THE MAPLE PILLAR

shining leaves, but never mingles in song or laughter. Beyond a doubt, this was meant for a pillar in Anger's house.

And should some king ask a house new in design and rare, could he mistake in choosing a maple for making his unique habitation? I call on all who cast eyes on this pillar branched like deer-antlers, to witness that who erected a palace out of these would have a habitation gorgeous even for a king. What palace of Versailles or Holyrood or Hohenzollern's house, or palace of De Medici, but would appear inelegant compared with a house whose roof was propped by these branched columns of the maple-tree?

And were I building to Silence a fane whose gentle colors should rest the eyes yet stimulate the thought, I would use elm pillars. This one seen in the picture would dignify any temple ever built. In color almost gray; for the rains have bleached it. Strength is here, no wind cares to attempt to twist and no rage of tempest can uproot. It lifts itself proudly, as it has good right to do. We took the picture when the rain was falling persistently. Spring was not yet at bloom, but Spring odors were set afloat by the falling rain, and a body found himself looking for dog-tooth violets as he walked along, and could not help it; and the air was genial and the sky was the color of wood-ashes, and sycamores were turning from white to the tint of green tourmaline in some places and in others to light chrysoprase, and clouds began to spray the forests in fun, and then to settle down to the honest business of raining. And the elm-trunk stood tall and commanding, as careless whether Winter or Spring were at his doorstep. His might was in himself. And my friend, the artist, would not let the drip of rain prevent this erect bole from marching from his woodland to this book. I hear the patter of the rain, and feel it now, and enjoy it now as then, and feel the rigid manliness of the elm pillar as it stood great in bulk and sense of strength and unobservant of rain or artist or me. This pillar is fitted to be built into the temple of Silence,



THE ELM PILLAR

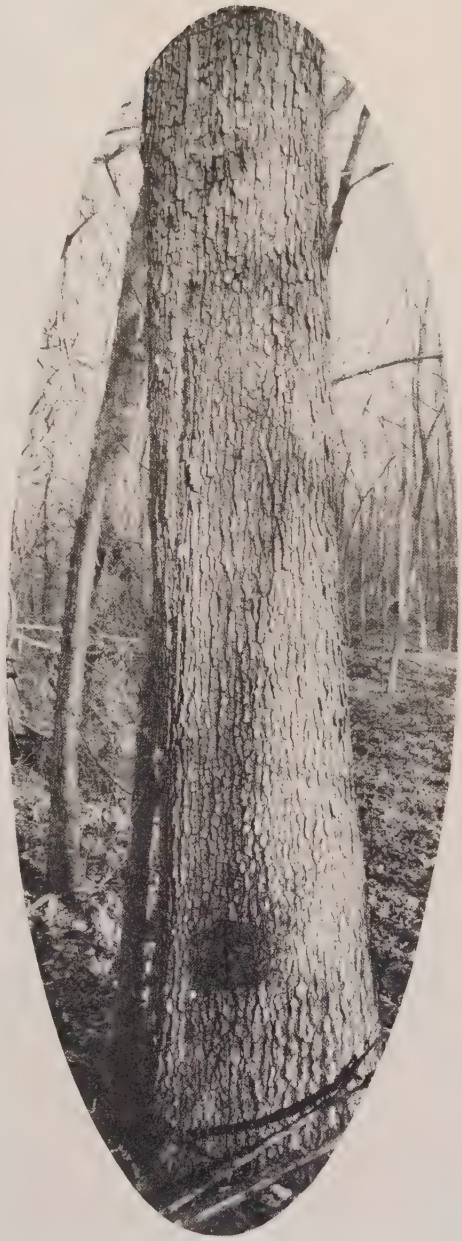
where are folded hands, and slowing heart-beat, and surcease of care, and the

"Benediction that follows after prayer."

Sometimes, when forests have been invaded of the woodsmen, I have gone like a chief mourner. My commercial instinct is sadly lacking. I know the worth of slain woods, but love not to consider it. We need them; but forests need them too. I would not be party to cutting down a living oak or elm or sycamore or walnut. It may be necessary; but I will crave the poetry of watching the living trunk crowd up skyward, and toss its cloud of shadow, grown up neighborly to the clouds of white in which the sky indulges. But to mark a broad hollow in the woods sown to prostrate walnut and elm trunks is to seem to see the ruin of some stately fane smitten with whirlwind and with fire, the pillars burnt black or ash-hued by the ravaging flames. There they lie prone, noble in death as in life; and I have walked with pathetic spirit among the ruins of St. Cloud, which used to be an emperor's palace where marriage rang golden bells and a prince imperial was born. Battle-fire has

blackened and bleakened the walls, and hostile cannon have hammered statue from pedestal, and have left splinters of ravage tossed everywhere; and the signs of desolation are as pitiful as the heart of sorrow with tearful face. All this have I watched; and the smutch and smell of smoke was on the dilapidation. So these black, prone pilasters of elm and walnut seem fire-smutched, only where on St. Cloud was the smell of smoke, on these fallen nobilities is the odor of forgotten summers. I could watch and weep.

And when a temple is builded to Wonder, then the cathedral-builder is to use ivy pillars. A million of these slender, emerald gracefulnesses should make wide circle to hold up the canopy of the sapphire sky—green holding up the blue. Could you dream that a dome expansive enough to hold all the blinking stars of gentle light, a dome of Oriental amethyst, could be spanned and set upon a million pilasters of chrysoprase, the amethyst dappled with the fair white of clouds and the chrysoprase pilasters carven to ivy tendril and leaf, would not that be architecture in which the splendor of gem should be touched into bewilderment by the presence of the infinite?



A WHITE OAK PILLAR

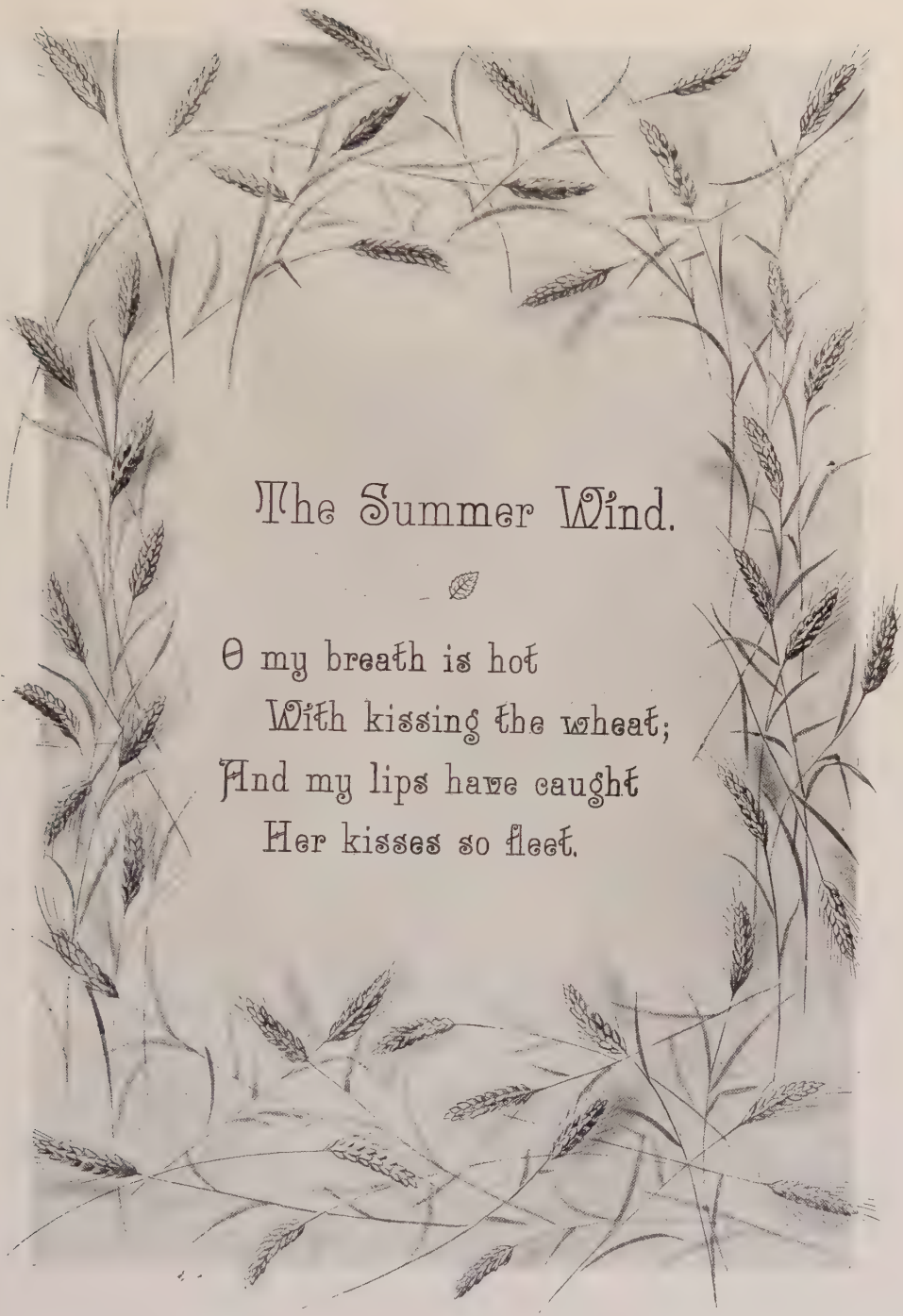
And the white-oak pillar! There it towers like a sea-cliff for majesty. Not any Roman patrician's palace was so wrought into cunning workmanship of tessellated pavement and wall and ceiling as this oak trunk. See how the patines lure your fingers to caress them. Honestly, I can hardly keep my fingers off this picture. I can fairly feel the roughness of the tree as it stands on my farm with its unsuspected wonder of loveliness. The eyes are satisfied as they trace these lines of cunning workmanship. Could might be wedded to more satisfying beauty? Could any artist contrive strength so beautified with song? There it stands on the hill ascent, a fear to the winds, a wonder to the woods, a silence to itself, a praise to God; a tree pillar on which, as we look, we feel the vault of the expanded heavens could lean and never discomfit the self-reliant column grown to the music of lonely Winter storms and the cadences of Summer winds which slipped across the night-world, quiet of foot as passing clouds,—so grown, so menaced, so madrigaled, but grown stern, erect, vast-thewed, beautiful, and eager for the anguish of holding up the sky.

TREE PILLARS IN LEAF

THE SUMMER WIND

ANSWERING TO THE SUMMER WIND

WHERE SUMMER WINDS TARRY

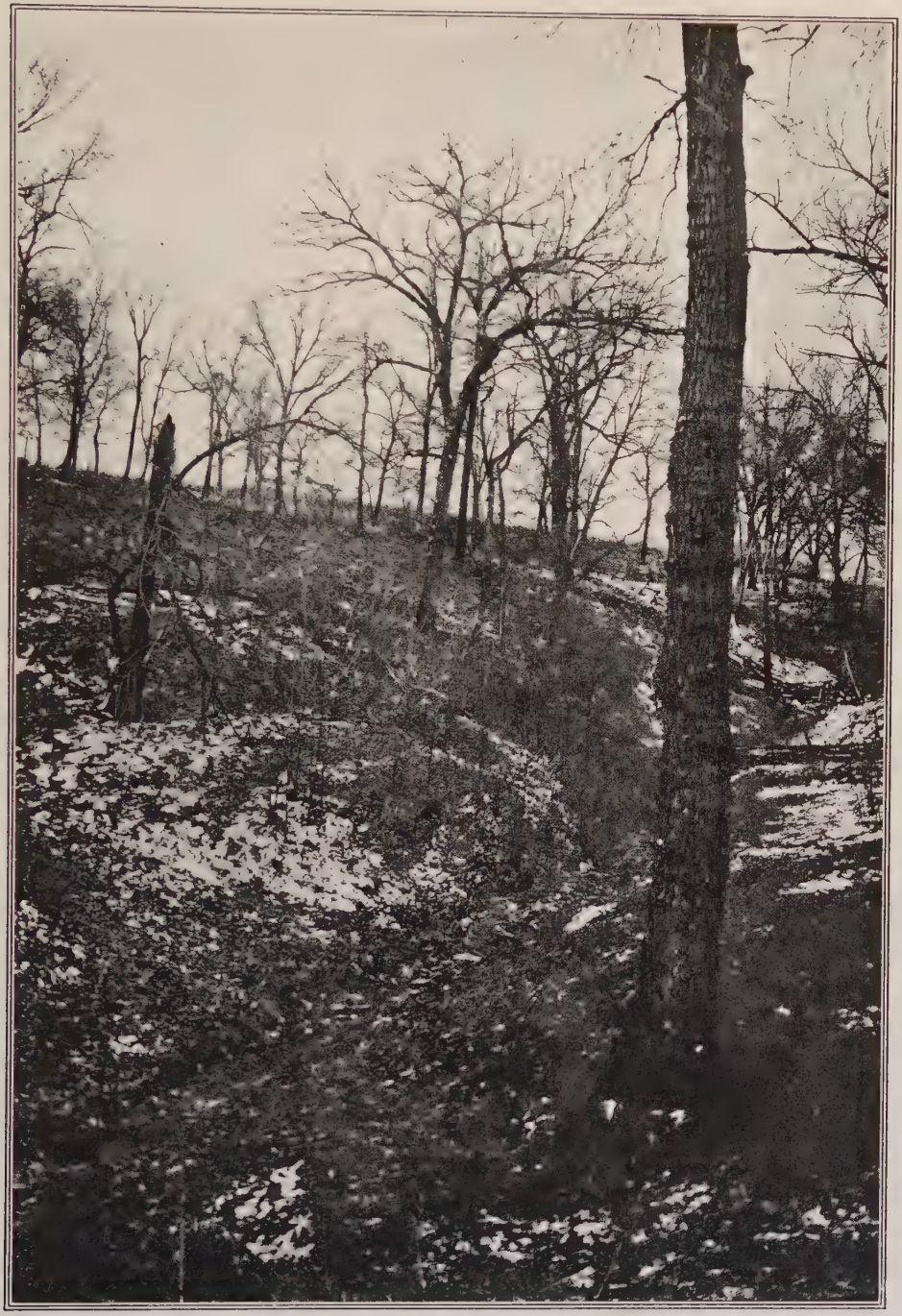


The Summer Wind.

O my breath is hot
With kissing the wheat;
And my lips have caught
Her kisses so fleet.

A DECEMBER SPRING

A SPRING IN JUNE



HEARKENING TO THE SUNLIGHT

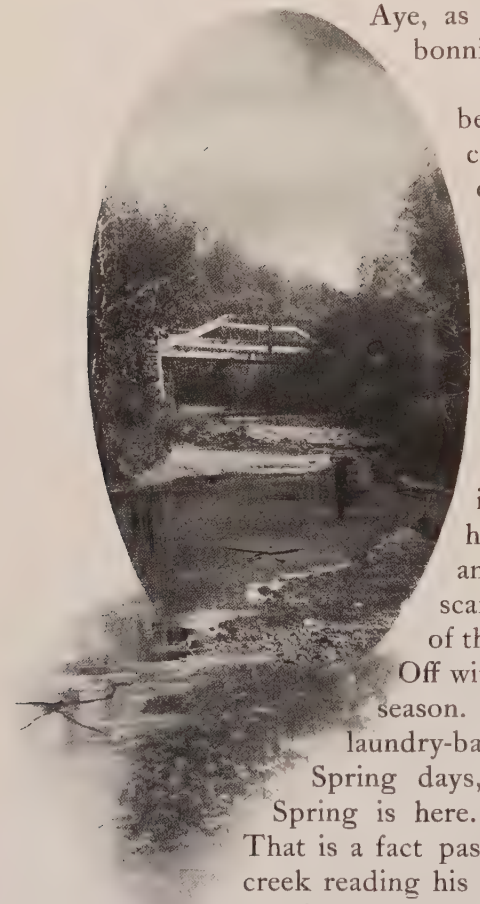
THE BLUEJAY

A DECEMBER SPRING

This Kansas weather trips up even the elect. Its whimsies are delicious. You never know what a day will bring forth; and sufficient unto the day is the climate thereof. Some, even many, berate this facility in adjusting the thermometer, talking in loud tones about "horrible changeableness." Now, this accusation could be brought against women with equal force, though, in a spirit of chivalry, I would certainly hope no man would be guilty of the impropriety of referring to woman's facile mood as "horribly changeable." That would be gross. Let us not believe it of any man. Woman's many-moodedness is among her charms,—one without which she would be appreciably poorer in that generous wealth of fascination of which she is mistress. We men love variableness in her; and why should we laud in women what we berate in weather? This is illogicality, the thing men accuse this Kansas weather of. Let us be consistent, seeing it is so easy.

The surprises of the weather enamor me. And when Winter has set his foot on our road sturdily walking like some unimaginative pedestrian and when he shakes snowflakes from his mantle and puffs icy winds into the face of human kind and makes the birds seek the sheltering woodlands, then to have him, for all his bluster, pushed off the path and Spring come smiling along as hunting

for violets—honestly, this tickles my funny-bone. I am, to tell the truth plainly, elated. Winter jostled out of his own highway by a bit of a lass like violet-hunting Spring! Aye, as says our Scotch friend, that is bonnie.



WHEN MAY IS HERE

The sky is blue, a trifle pale as becometh a December sky. The cold has driven the blue blush out of the cheek till the wide canopy is a blue as if affrighted. As a body looks, the blue seems about to thrust clouds out into the open. But this is a make-believe of the December atmosphere. Not a cloud is intended. This is not cloud but pallor we perceive. Fear not that Winter is stealing back to snub us with his surliness and occupy this road and drive us shivering, like the scant foliage, back into the shelter of the house. It is temporary Spring. Off with your overcoat. Insult not the season. Throw your gloves into the laundry-bag. We do not wear gloves on Spring days, do we? Come, be mannerly; Spring is here. I know ice is on the stream. That is a fact past denying; but the hobo by the creek reading his daily paper, turning his soles to the fire which burns cheerily, exuding fragrance, and sending up its mobile cloud of blue wood-smoke,—the hobo falls asleep with his head leaning on his hands—fast asleep in the sun. He knows it is Spring; and the languor of the season has overcome him.

How warm the sunlight is! The air is crisp, like early evening in the early Spring—crisp, but delicious. If I do

not mind, I will be hunting my fishing-pole in a minute; but I must not. How unseemly would be the sight of a sane man going fishing in the presence of Christmas. No; I must restrain myself. Whatever the vagaries of the weather, I must not myself become a vagary. I must not invade the sanctities of the almanac. The almanac says that for about a week now we are having blizzards and much snow. However inaccurate this talk of the almanac is, I must not let on. No; no fish-pole. This is December, nearing Christmas, although it is Spring. But more things than I are getting mixed by this invasion of spring. The birds are topsy-turvy; and they think themselves so smart as that they never consult Ayers's Almanac about seasons or weather. They are egotists, these birds. They need not deny it. They can not. And so these important little folks are acting silly this day. A crowd of sparrows is building a nest! I shrink from recording this bit of bird insanity; but they have snubbed me so often that I, with becoming Christian spirit, will take this opportunity of snubbing them. I judge these sparrows are communists, leastwise a company of birds, and not the usual conjugal two, but a company is busy building, some looking on, some inspecting with critical eyes, some in a droll way saying, The job you are doing is very well for you, but—; others bringing long straws, and others still, surly grasses, and putting them into place with desperate energy, as if they were to pay a forfeit if this nest were not completed by noon. Aye, laddies, for all your self-conceit, your new

THE SENTINELS OF THE STREAM

house will be filled with snow from cellar to garret before very long; and then will you read the almanac, I wonder? Really I am coming to think that birds are not so much smarter than the rest of mankind, notwithstanding all their sagacious airs. An English sparrow deluded by the seductions of Kansas weather! Plainly Kansas weather is ahead.

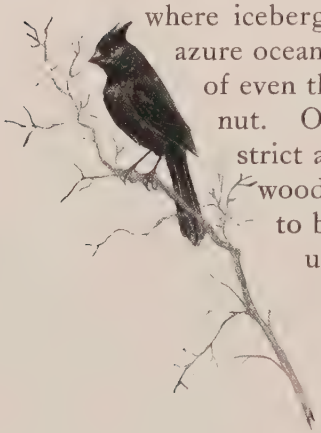
But how the sunlight streams, and with what generous flame it warms the shocks of corn and the dull precision of the standing corn and the brown meadows where the meadow-larks built their nest and tossed their limpid music across the waving green as in a jest of song! I miss my guess if this thing would not delude the larks, an they were here. But they are gone; not a sprig of any one of them walking across the prairies they love; not a yellow-breast belted tight across a warm heart. Gone? Gone! And truly it is *not* Spring. Why do not the sparrows take note that the larks are not here, as they surely would be if Spring had returned for keeps? Wheatfields are of a surly blush betwixt death and greenery as waking from a sullen sleep; crows gad about the sky as thinking Spring is here, or sit in the white limbs of the cottonwood in the neighborhood as if to warm their feet by that mellow sunlight. I warm my hands, stretching them out against the sun. How beyond praise this springtime weather is! Winter, was it months ago or years! I will not compute, satisfied that Spring has come and the sun is warm and the landscape laughs in a wealth of light and joy.

A WINTER TENT

In a bend of the stream the nut-hatches are holding a festival. To me (lying here on the flat of my back, stretched as far as an elongated providence allows me), looking up through the spread of branches where they are congregated, it looks as if they were holding a family reunion. The whole tribe seems to be bent on having a jolly talk all at once. Tittering a good deal I allow, but at family gatherings this is appropriate. Queer little voices they have, birds talking in whispers as if they were all lovers. Spring is it, my lads and lassies? You think so, walking quickly along the shaggy arms of the elm you are housed in, paying no heed to me: though really why should you? I am behaving; and people do not give much attention to those who behave. It is when you misbehave that you are noticed. And I, lying still, behaving, noting the quiddities of these feathered families engaged in their colloquies like a pack of lovers,—I am glad that Spring brought you to this inglenook of the woods; for the high bank builds its wall against the unneighborly North; and the East bank is high and shuts out obtrusive East winds if they were ill-mannered enough to blow; and the skies of the South build a tent so

WHERE I WATCHED THE GATHERING STORM

that the woods and banks shut the whole world off, save from the wide sky with its complacent sun; and the South opens to the South where the swallows toss their shadows across the streams and fringing meadows,—the South, where icebergs fling their last white pinnacle into the azure ocean, the land where the sun kisses the cheeks of even the women folks to a brown like a hickory-nut. Open to the South! And the sun pays strict attention to warming up this recess of the woods and in making a bird's holiday a thing to be glad over. And the south wind streams up the ravine and has a breath of Summer in it. Birdies, sing out loud, can't you? Spring is here.



THE REDBIRD

And the farmer thinks it is Spring, I reckon; for he has taken his overshoes off. This hardy man, the farmer, has become sorely effeminate. He husks corn with mittens on, he plows with an umbrella over him, he wears overshoes in Winter with a fidelity which puts to shame my lazy disinclination to such a belonging of aristocracy. But to-day he has not his overshoes buckled tight above his instep, nor has he on his rubber boots. It is Spring! Plainly and incontrovertibly, this is Spring. The farmer has shed his overshoes. Spring is here.

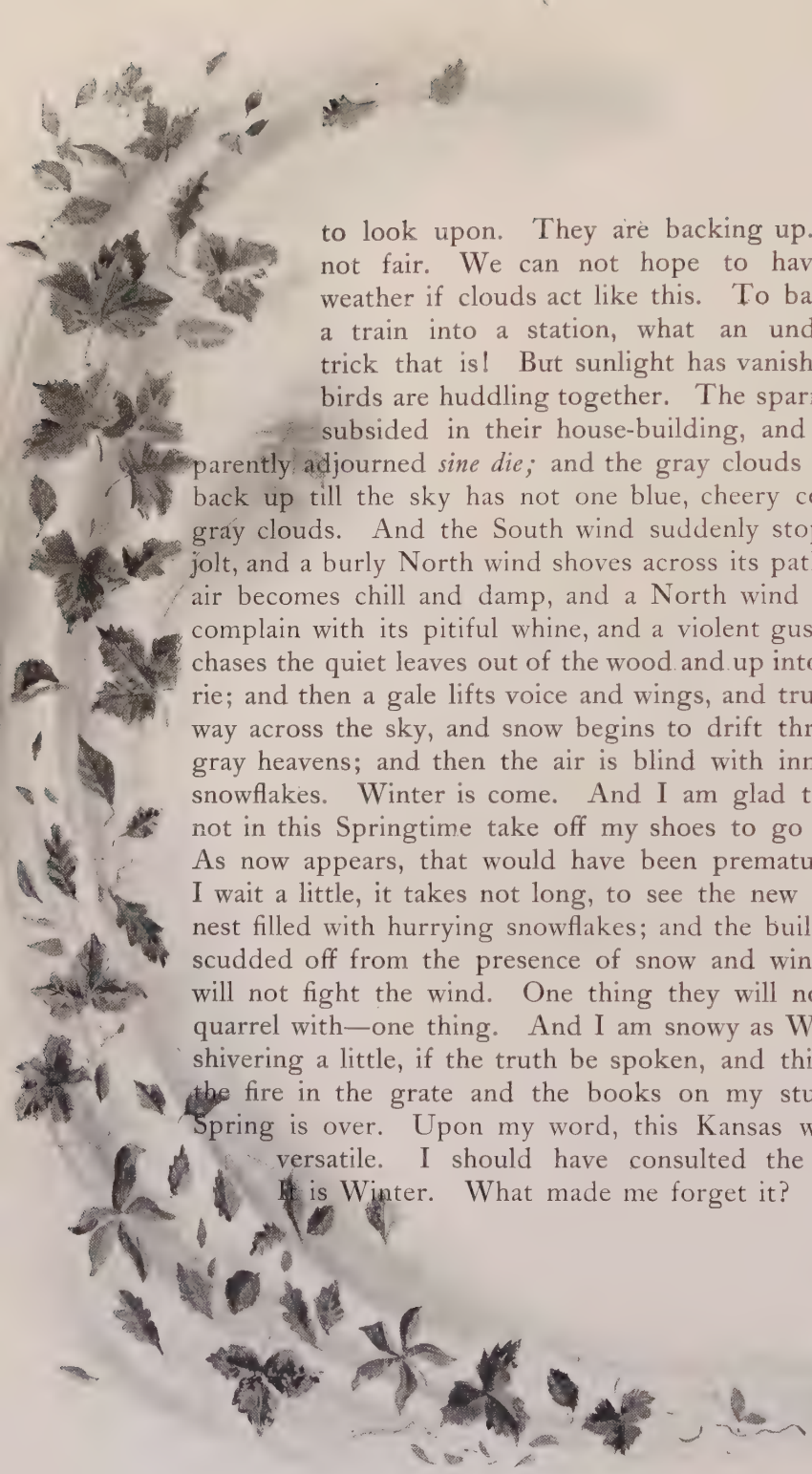
Sycamores sprawl out their long, lean arms to catch every patch of the light falling upon them; and the white-oaks, with their brown leaves kept as mementos, glow with a dull light as of lamps seen through brown curtains; and the cattle grow waggish, and dare each other to bunt a spell; and the hens are talking blithely with that heartening "ca, ca, ca, ca," which seems to be a hen's due-bill to the effect that eggs are about to be laid; and the roosters flap their wings and crow and look big, and then, with commendable bluster, invite the women to come and eat some tidbit they have found, which essaying to do, they rush to

them, only to find the men chickens eating it hungrily. There still remains a good deal of human nature in chickens, specially a good deal of man nature in rooster chickens. Education has not yet eliminated it. Is there ice on the stream? Scarcely. It is Spring. Dog-tooth violets are doubtless sneaking around somewhere to surprise me with that fine delight I always experience when I see the first dog-tooth. If only Herrick were here to puff out his cheeks and talk a little poetry from the gladness of

THE LONELY ROAD

his heart! Hail, gentle Spring! Did I hear a cuckoo call, "cuck-oo-oo, cuck-oo;" and was that a robin's trill?

But what's up? The sunlight disappears as by some evil magic. I see no cloud nor any hint of cloud. All the South is open, spacious, inviting. What ails the sun? And I flounder off my back, struggle to a vertical position, pull the wrinkles out of my trousers (I must be elegant whatever happens), and look around. Upon my word, the entire North is packed with clouds gray and shivery



to look upon. They are backing up. This is not fair. We can not hope to have settled weather if clouds act like this. To back in like a train into a station, what an underhanded trick that is! But sunlight has vanished. The birds are huddling together. The sparrows have subsided in their house-building, and have apparently adjourned *sine die;* and the gray clouds positively back up till the sky has not one blue, cheery corner—all gray clouds. And the South wind suddenly stops with a jolt, and a burly North wind shoves across its path, and the air becomes chill and damp, and a North wind begins to complain with its pitiful whine, and a violent gust of wind chases the quiet leaves out of the wood and up into the prairie; and then a gale lifts voice and wings, and trumpets its way across the sky, and snow begins to drift through the gray heavens; and then the air is blind with innumerable snowflakes. Winter is come. And I am glad that I did not in this Springtime take off my shoes to go barefoot. As now appears, that would have been premature. And I wait a little, it takes not long, to see the new sparrow's nest filled with hurrying snowflakes; and the builders have scudded off from the presence of snow and wind. They will not fight the wind. One thing they will not pick a quarrel with—one thing. And I am snowy as Winter and shivering a little, if the truth be spoken, and think about the fire in the grate and the books on my study table. Spring is over. Upon my word, this Kansas weather is versatile. I should have consulted the almanac. It is Winter. What made me forget it?

THE MOUNTAINS

A MOUNTAIN SHEEP

THE CLIMBING MOUNTAIN

THE MOUNTAINS

PURPLE PEAKS REMOTE

MOUNTAIN is a descriptive word, meaning to climb. Mountains are the climbers toward the dawn. They are this solid world's most emphatic response to the sky and stars. Slight is the wonder, then, that they are accounted sublime. The world's upclambering to outtop itself and gain admission to the spaces infinite can have but one result upon the soul, to lift it, as on the mountain's brawny shoulders, nigh to heaven. He who writes is not so witless as to suppose that mountains will make men good, or erase the littleness from little souls. God can not do such high things for such as will not let Him; but the native tendency of mountains strenuous for the far blue heavens is to shake littleness and meanness from the life, and bid it have the larger mood, and live a nearer neighbor to the morning.

For this reason humanity has always felt the mountains. Alp and Apennine, Taurus and Hermon, Carmel and Ida, have stepped into the midst of men like a fellow-man, only one of giant stature and severe repose and manifest destiny. They have spelled out strange meanings in the

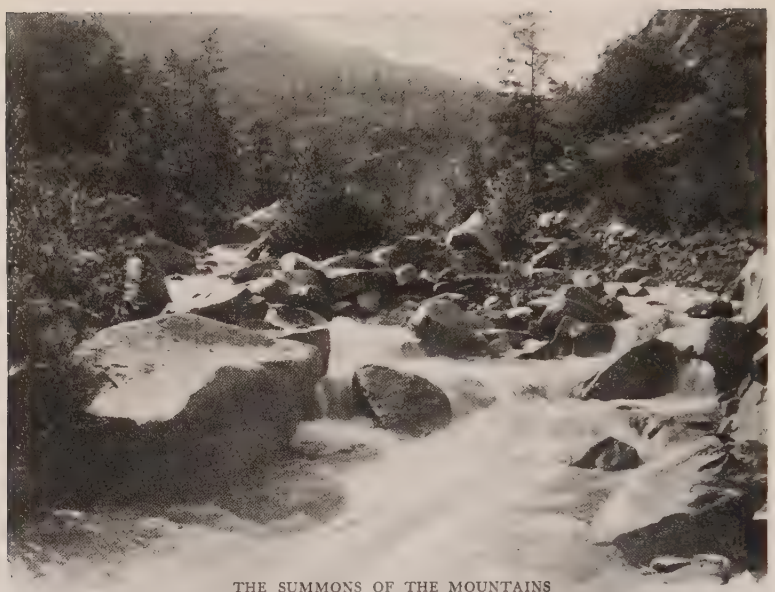
thinking of the world. Mount Parnassus was where the poets dwelt; and Hymettus was honey-breathed and filled with drone of bees; and Olympus was where Jove and his lesser gods had festival and palace; and Sinai was where it was mete God should come amidst a storm of darkness thick at noon, and lit only with the lightning's lamps, and shaking with the tramp of God; and on Ararat the lonely ship set its weary foot to rest a thousand years. Mountains have caught the eyes and thoughts and imaginations of centuries too numerous to count. They have filled men with a sense of heaven approachable and God accessible. These were ladders earth had, with a toil unspeakable, thrown up against the lintel of the day that had no sad eclipse of night.

When I had grown to manhood with never a glimpse of other than a prairie hill, one summer afternoon I came to where mountains bulked huge against the skies. For hours, along the far edge of the smoking plain a blue cloud had been enlarging and solidifying; at first a dim shadow, filmy as a wreath of wood-smoke which a quiet wind could disperse; but this blue stayed, and had no wish for dissolution: and then the cloud mounted a shadow higher, and became a trifle bluer and less tenuous, and then the top grew to, as it were, the shadow of a shape which, as I traced with wondering and eager eyes, refused to give exactitude of form. Along the dusty, wind-swept, and blistering plain not a film of cloud swung its banner in the sky. The heavens were brass, molten, despairing,

WHENCE COMETH HELP

terrible. The sole clouds which came across our goings were stifling clouds of desert dust, smoking as from some burning pit. Watching westward eagerly, our blue cloud shaped into abiding hope. We neared: it stayed. Our hearts were helped: our eyes were rested from our desert glare. The blue cloud ridged itself into definite form. The shadowy outlines gave place to lines fine yet stern as an etching. We felt their unwavering blue. Stability took the place of evanescence. We knew we were sighting not lineaments of clouds, but looking mountains in the face. From this time forward the mountain effect grew with every inch of journey. What had been shadowy became granitic in definiteness and solidity. The blue climbed the heavens like a sea-crag from a mist. The coolness of meadows on high hills began to call to our spirits. We were forgetting the desert sands which stifled breathing, and beginning to feel our feet climb precipices neighbors to the snows. The mountains were invading the landscape of our life. The rims of distant outlines became dented as if we looked not at a surface but at a bulk. Shadows became evident in the sides of these climbing masses. Sunshine smiled, here, upon a peak; and there, the cooling shade blackened but did not bleaken a mountain side. The range sprang into definiteness and meaning. Peaks began to break up from the blue outline. The cloud effect had vanished. We were in presence, not of clouds, but a goodly gathering of God's mountainous acclivities. The range became serrate; and on a sudden, exhilarant moment, a white flag of truce to heat and weariness and care fluttered, or seemed to flutter, from the turret of this Castle of Content. It was a snowy crest. And we felt the simoom breath no longer; but cooling airs swam downward from those remote heights, and made, as it were, autumnal coolness for us poor, dusty wayfarers. Mountains!

And in the afternoon, in sight of a high mountain



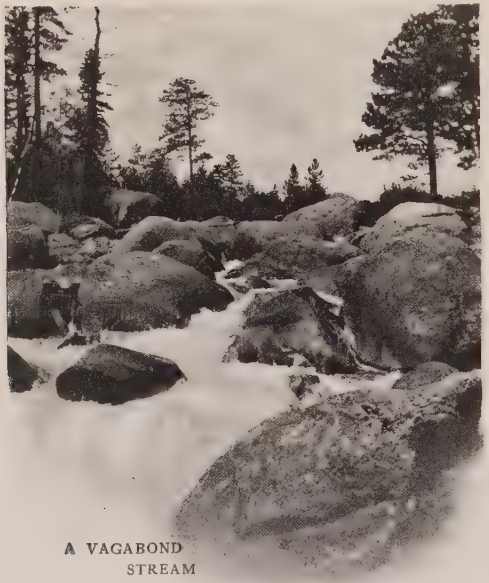
THE SUMMONS OF THE MOUNTAINS

scarfed with snows, I set foot on mountain granite for the first, and lifted heart and eyes to mountain summits for the first, and began, with a run like a gust of wind, the swift ascent. I tarried not for a hostel. I asked no directions. I wanted no companions. I asked no leave. God had given me leave. The mountains called me by my name; and I answered with a hurrying call, "Coming!" And I came. The burnt brown rocks built ledges or threw hills about in giant profusion and bewilderment. Gullies deep enough to hide cathedral spires plunged down at unanticipated spots. Pinnacles arose, built by defeated winds and storms. Mountain poppies flowered in the rocks. A mountain stream rushed past as answering a wild summons. Lizards flashed along the yellow bowlders. The sun burnt hot yet welcoming. From the white shield the mountain wore across its breast a cooling wind breathed gently as a prayer. The stout hill climbed eagerly.

The air was an ecstasy for breathing. Hot as the hot climb was, to sit in shadow of rock or pine was to wipe the sweat from the face and feel delicious coolness. "Like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Ho, you ancient mountaineer, give us your hand! You climbed this height before me. We are comrades. Old friend, your hand, your hand. Come, may I sit beneath the great rock you found those centuries ago? I thank you for your courtesy, and seat me in the refreshment of the blessed shadow. My feet refused to be still. They said, "Climb. We have waited for our lifetime for this episode, let us be gone;" and can a man's soul hesitate when his feet have visions of far peak and snow-cliff and shadows murk at noon? Climb on. The way was short. I was high as clouds above the world, but had barely climbed a furlong of the mountain, as I could see from the ascending rocks that rimmed the remote sky. My breath grew short and came in gusts; but what of that? Breath was plenty. I had been storing it up all my life. I was from the prairies where the winds grew. Plenty of breath, but the mountains for the first time in a life. Haste, haste! And how I climbed. Why, swallows were not more keen of wing than I of foot. Weariness was wine. The mountain beckoned. Clouds floated wistfully. The bleak rocks climbed steadily. The world slowly sunk into the plain. A city whence I started my climbing came to be a thing of uncertainty, as if it were a mirage. I had climbed for

THE COOLING MOUNTAINS

hours. I thought to scale the mountain ere the sun set. I had climbed high. The air was growing cooler and sweeter. Pines were booming like waves on the rocks. I sat in their surf, washed with their spray. Clouds lay at anchor in the pine-tops like fisher-boats. The wind blew tenderly. Glory searched the crystalline air with his burning lamp. Nothing was hid from the light thereof. Note you not, my heart, when these larger moods of the world walk across your plains, how Scripture leaps to the lips like leap of swords? Those great beholders felt the universe. They had been with God; and such companionship clamored for the big word and the wide vision. And on a sudden, like eclipse, night was over me with its tent lit with stars. Was it night? And was I, a prairie man, alone, unguided on the far side of a great mountain, pine-grown, snow-crowned, many-musiced, gigantic, muttering as if with intention of tempests? What a gala night to be overtaken by the dark, citadeled in the sky, close neighbor to many stars, where the mountain river, when the night had come and subdued the daylight voices, clamored, lifting up many a song I had never heard sung, and having great rejoicing. To sit, as I sat, with the stars burning brilliant as I had never known them, and darkness buckling me tight to the mountain's side as I had been a sword at rest, and the pines answering to the flood of rushing waters, and the world blotted out, not one poor rushlight of human habitation visible, the earth below and the unseen front of the acclivity

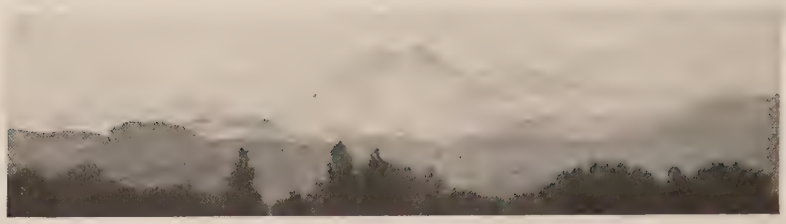


A VAGABOND STREAM

at rest thousands of feet above me in the starlit darkness, silent and waiting grandly for the dawn! This was my introduction to the mountains. And in truth I may not say that I could have wished it other than it was. A noble memory, which companies with me these years, and will not leave me in the years to come.

Since then, how many mountains have I climbed! I can not count them. Selkirk, Sierra, Rocky, Alleghany, White Mountain, Green Mountain, tor and ben,—these have I loved to frequent and to climb. Never a height mine eyes have seen that my feet did not love to climb. Their far tops beckon me; and I come. I am Oread by wiser relation than mythology. These fastnesses, where shadows and snows never melt, where dawns and dusks love to weave their lustrous patterns, where rivers are squeezed from mountain drifts and spurt from glacier fronts,—can I ever know enough of them? I was meant to tent me in their shadows, and lie awake watching their clear-shining stars, inhaling their wonder and delight: lie on my breast and drink at these Pierian springs, answer the echoes of the waterfalls which "flap like eagles in their eyries," outrun the racing streams which seem so strangely eager for the sea, climb where the snows waste not when the midsummer comes, rest where no foot has left a print in strange, inaccessible retreats,—meant for this, or, if not, why do these Alps make my blood churn as if whipped by some swift wheel turned by a relentless current? Mountains, we men of the lowlands love you, and sigh for you when we can not see your furrowed sides or stand beneath your music-making shadows. The memory of you makes us glad; the sight of you makes us shout like boys let out from school on unexpected holiday; and to set foot upon the lowest rung in your snowy ladder to begin the sheer ascent, turns us into dervishes wild as your own winter winds.

How the Alps had their way with Ruskin! How the



THE SUBLIME MOUNTAINS

Sierras, through and through, have made John Muir drunk as a bacchanal! Who can blame either of them? For their intoxication we love them. Best men will always love the mountain might and altitude and reserve, and fair, high meadows, and rush of many streams, and fading lights at evening, and kindling lights at daybreak, and solemn epic poem of achievement for this world of things and men. The glorious mountains were in the blood of Bret Harte and of Joaquin Miller; and the New England mountains were in the blood of Whittier. How he did love them, and climb them, and sing them! How they haunted him, and how their shadows flung them across his heart like the shadow on a dial! They were his dial-shadows. Chimborazos he never knew; but such as he knew, he loved to the tuning of his lute. For a quiet mountain atmosphere, such as heartens when the days are sweating in the sun, this has not many peers:

> "Yet on my cheek I feel the Western wind,
> And hear it telling to the orchard trees,
> And to the faint and flower-forsaken bees
> Tales of fair meadows, green with constant streams,
> And mountains rising blue and cold behind,
> Where in moist dells the purple orchis gleams,
> And starred with white the virgin's bower is twined."

Mountains,—but the ones he knew, cloud-shadowed, unremote, without bleakness, gorgeous in green, wind-swayed as if they were plumes tossed aloft to catch each passing zephyr,—but such mountains as cool the hot dusts along the burning way where naked feet must walk on necessitated journeys. The mountain's coolness and shadow and song!

The mountains climb. They want the skies. To know

PART MOUNTAIN AND PART CLOUD

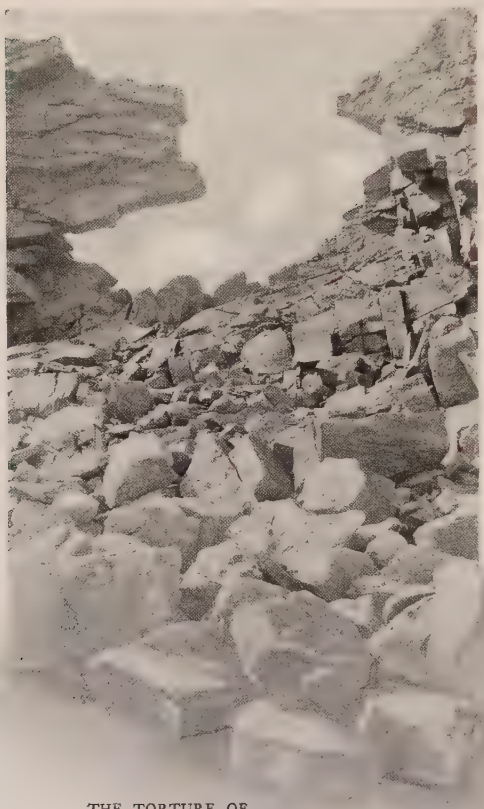
that a whole continent slopes slowly and without recognition, to crest at last in a long, snowy, many-peaked turbulence of mountain range, is to bring aspiration home to men. I never cross long prairies which at last wash green waves against bases of brown rocks, or toss up against the glistening tumult of weary foot-hills, without the sense of the slow, sure climb heavenward. The panting engine knows the mountains are calling from afar. Every single mile tilts skyward a little, just a little, but abates not of its claim to the far summits, as if to whisper: "We, too, are

WHERE WINTER LASTS

on our pilgrimage to the pale cliffs that wear the ermine of the snows. They are ours. We also are longers for the sky. We are coming to the clouds." Is there anything more caressing than this mood of slow but sure ascent, this longing of a continent to neighbor with the sun, this solemn journey unto and into heaven?

Wrath is at home amongst mountains. Vengeance seems to have displayed all its virulence here. Anguish

is written everywhere. Writhing is petrified in the long ranges of the bleak upper mountains. Torture worked its worst in these fierce defiles. Whichever way we look, Inferno has been sculptured in the eternal rocks. Those martyrdoms of the long ago which here make their moan perpetual, were unchronicled save by this stone hieroglyph. What fury wrought in those remotest days when mountains were being thrust into place, we may dimly guess at as we climb. A prairie is a place of peace; a mountain is a place of wrathing tempests. Disorder wild, crude, titanic, furious as Arthur's battle by the sea, here holds sway by the right of wrath. Pike's Peak summit seems as it had been used of Him who built the Rocky Range as a refuse heap, where materials chipped from the thousand edges of precipice and tower had been thrown in rank disorder. For sense of terrible desolation, for hopelessness and woe, this pile of wreckage has few compeers. What gashes and huge axhewings are among these mountain passes! How they refuse to be quiet and rest in placid peace! How pass on pass of darkness at noon, of springing peak, as if thrust to the awful upward leap by the jagging of some crueler spear than Achilles or Hector ever held in iron hand! These forlorn rocks seem spirits



THE TORTURE OF THE MOUNTAINS

in hades. They have each one a fresh form of woe. They know no iteration. They are strangled, are burnt in seven times heated furnaces; are flung from tall pediments into a bottomless pit; are urged to the fearful yawning of some fierce chasm; are pendent like an icicle dripped from this cruel roof a thousand æons ago; are ranked in lines like soldiers doomed to die; are goaded to the jutting ledges of slippy acclivities; are tossed like frozen foam on winter seashore; are broken on the wheel; are impaled as ancient defeated armies were; are crushed into kneeling like those kings who did obeisance to Nebopolasser; are turned topsy-turvy as hurled from high mountain pinnacles long since disappeared. Frenzy is written on the mountains which crest a continent. This rank and wild dishevelment is to be had for the going. No one can interpret it. Pictures such as these presented here (though they are noble interpretations) are inadequate. The massiveness is lost. The thousand feet of slipping breccia are not visible save as we stand at the base and watch with our own eyes the fearsome sight. How the neat, well-groomed world is rebuked when we watch this mountain dishevelment! Here, blood riots. The savage instinct for might, naked might, becomes apparent. We seem part of the early, wrathful forces of the making of a world. We see how worlds were made, what travail was on their birth, what fury reveled, what despair was victorious. For myself, I confess to having my blood tangle like a yeasting sea when this witness to the frenzy of past milleniums is beside, above, below me. Here are the perpetuated evidences of those frightful forces which took in their two fierce and powerful hands a continent, and tore it as if it had been a rotten rag, and scattered its remnants wheresoe'er they would. Tragedy is here: and tragedy does souls good. We become less self-considering, less self-conscious. In presence of pains which, matched with ours, makes ours but make-believe, life becomes strenuous. Such wild con-

fusion reshapes our attitudes. A cameo ceases to be the latest word art has to utter. The colossal and tempestuous become artistic. Conventionals are slain by this robber brood of mountain anguishes. To be trim, we learn, is not the final lesson to the soul. To be colossal is a wider word, even though to become so we needs must wade through tragedy neck-deep, or be hurled from the precipices as these mountains were. Enamel is not of the mountains. How furious, glutton powers worked here fiercer far than a million Goths who mistook battle for a revel. Far away in the interior of great ranges, where these brutal forces swept their sea of angered might, it is worth while to climb and feel the fierceness of things. These mountains, with their healing of the hills, with their compulsion to cease thinking of self and learn thinking of them, with their rest and great blessed peace remote and sweet, grew out of despair. Is that worth committing to memory as we do favorite poems? I think it is.

But afar, the mountains are the homes of peace. However tortured the interior of these vast ridges, they have, to those who dwell far off, the seeming of an endless calm. "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills" is not the saying of one man, but of a race of men. We valley dwellers grow so wearied, and our eyeballs ache; but when across long distances a range of mountains stands blue and beautiful along the sky, and lifts a height of silver up anon to catch the sun; and the sunlight smiles from the mountain-sides, or shadows gloom in valleys of the range; and all the while great, unperturbed quiet rests there: no wind seems blowing: no restlessness pervades the engaging calm,—then we look and say, "The name of that mountain is Peace." To watch a distant range shift lights from morning unto noon, and noon unto night; to see dawns wake and dusks fall asleep; to have scarfs of cloud swung from a tall staff of rugged summit or wind them round its breast; to feel the silent majesty of a might the storms

THE CLAMORING STREAM

have not been strong enough to slay; to note how centuries have walked along these deep defiles of mountains, but have barely worn a footpath across their shoulders: to set these stabilities in the heart, is to find the shadow where we rest until all care has vanished utterly. The lengthening shadows, the blackness increasing on the eastward sides as night comes on, the varying lights that crowd fast as the feet of winds till pinks and purples mix them with the dusks and darks,—ah me! the rest and comfort and calmness of the mountains!

"STEPPING STONES TO HIGHER THINGS"

Eternality sits on the mountains. We feel their enduringness. While centuries pass, these abide. Compared with Mount Tacoma the immortal Sphinx is but a child in years. How little have the wide-open Sphinx's eyes seen to compare with what those unblinking mountain eyes have looked upon! Centuries, tribes, conditions,—all have come and passed like a flitting cloud; but the white wonder of that sole peak thrusting out from the margin of the widest sea, changes not. Europe has nothing so bold, beautiful, bleak, tremendous as this one height, where winters never fold their tents, nor any Summer cloud wanders, nor any song of brook or bird disturbs the polar calm of the far solitudes. Those who are thought to know affirm that about this one mountain's loins are bound glaciers which outbulk the combined glaciers of the Alps. Be that as it may, its majesty sinks into the soul so that,

once seen, it can no more be forgotten than a face we love. Lasting, is the opportune word to apply to mountains. Those bold Alps which scorned Cæsar, stood across the path bold Napoleon took. They cared not for the one Cæsar nor the other. Themselves were the only Cæsars worth the naming. Julius and Bonaparte are gone. They can not return; but these grim Alps stay on. They shall stand tall and unbending at a hundred Cæsars' funerals. The Helvetians are no more: the Alps stare at the sun and stars now as then. The clank of Roman march and the wild shriek of locomotive leaping through the cloudy passes are alike inconsequent to those old brown peaks. The nations die; the mountains live. Vesuvius smoked over doomed Herculaneum, and smokes now, with its dim cloud of misty fear curling slowly through the brilliant Italian blue. The lasting, the outlasting hills! Up Mount Moriah, Great-heart Abraham climbed with a broken heart; and under Oriental splendor of sky that hoary mountain climbs with its templed top to bid the morning welcome now. The mountains are our patriarchs. The Acropolis is a place of ruins, a hill dedicated to despair; but what it was it is. What Pericles looked upon of stern acclivity, and what musing, mighty Æschylus brooded over, lasts. That one thing, the Acropolis, would those old doers and dreamers know if they could come Athens way again. The stately Parthenon, that is spent like an exhausted fortune: those clambering marble dawns are wrecked sea-ships now; but the old stone-cored hill abates nothing of its calm supremacy, and frowns down on Athens now, and will, till Athens dies. Small wonder is it if men have, without schooling, called the mountains eternal. If storms and years cut creases in their sides, we can not see them. The mountains wrap their silent remoteness around them for a cloak, and never tell of a greater yesterday. "What we are, we are," is all the elocution we may force from these grim disciples of silence. Unperturbed; rimming the

MOUNTAIN-BORN

sky, glutted with sunsets; mystical with the Eleusinian mysteries of millions of mornings; courageous to withstand storms and winters as not knowing they had been; flouting the wasting years as in saturnine jest; billowed against the heavens like cumulus clouds which sternly refuse to dissipate; stern yet tender, the Puritans of Nature; mottled with lights and shadows; fearful with winters which know no bluebird's call; lasting, sempiternal, fated to outstay empires, kingdoms, republics, careless which holds sway; somber, sunlit, glorious,—mountains, you are our visible eternities; and toward your everlastingness we who are about to die turn fading glance, and then salute you.

Many a night have I lain on the music-making shore of Tahoe, and watched the shifting glory of the dying lights as the sun set and the day expired. Of what I have seen in varying portions of this beautiful world of ours, I call to mind not any thing more impressive. Though, as for that, all things are so expressive and impressive that while

we watch one glory it blots out the rest. Nature does not compete with itself. It lifts a sunrise, or a rising star, or a wash of gigantic sea-wave, or a ruined Alp, or a stretch of yellow desert, or a star-sown night, and displays these as if they were gems thrown loosely in the pocket, and meant not to vie with each other, but to add one to another. There is something solitary in all Nature does. In such execution is neither yesterday nor to-morrow. Or by Tahoe to see day pass from morning until dark, to watch the first dimming stars of morning, and watch on to the first kindling stars of dusk, is to be spectator of gorgeous pageants. Nothing kingly done of man was ever half so wonder-drenched. Tahoe lies in a deep hollow of the upper Sierras, girt round by rugged mountains. There are no passes out save where the river runs. You climb over the marl of extinct volcanoes to come to this chalice flooded with blue sky; for so the waters of Tahoe seem. They are as blue as Italian skies. On one side you climb over denuded peaks to gain access; on the other you climb over heights black with pines. Brave cliffs fringe the lake edge. Shakespeare Cliff springs up a thousand feet, a sea-crag far removed from the prodigious sea. Not a mountain flower roots along its glassy surface. It sentinels its shore like a forsaken soldier. But in the background, snowy peaks lift up their imposing altitudes. How often I have, through the singing of sunny waves and solemn pines standing close to the water's edge, looked at the white shields the mountains wore each across his heart as fearing attack! Blue lake, green-black pines; and through the lattices of pine-trees the white majesty of snowy crest; the singing waves, the sighing pines, the silent mountains; the world shut out and very far off, the battalions of mountains making a phalanx about lake and pine, so that neither could see way of breaking through, nor was there any sign of wishing to escape. The sun glowed through crystalline air; the scant clouds were in no hurry;

the sky was intensely blue: the lake was blue as the sky. Life seemed shut out: peace seemed shut in. The calm mountains loomed afar. The cliffs were manly and not remote. The pines climbed the mountains like a marching army, in no haste, but as purposeful to stand upon the utmost edge. The barren mountain-sides wore a look of sorrow; the snow summits wore a look of elation; the pine-grown mountains wore a look of comfort; and the sunny waves kept singing with Pippa:

> "The year 's at the Spring,
> And day 's at the morn;
> Morning 's at seven;
> The hillside 's dew-pearled;
> The lark 's on the wing;
> The snail 's on the thorn;
> God 's in His heaven—
> All 's right in the world."

TAHOE-BOUND

A sunny day at such a place is fittled to set the surliest lips to sing. The waves singing have their way. Wonder and delight make their joyous holiday. We can not weary of our company. The mountains are so grand and fair and far, and yet in reach of a voice if we were to call. Waterbrooks come laughing down from the mountain snows, and rush with great laughter into Tahoe, whose waters are clear as air; and the rejoicing sun swings his half-circle with delight, until at evening the western mountain-slopes, where pines climb from base to

summit, grow black, and the sun sinks below peaks black as storm-clouds. Then begins the battle between light and darkness, and the play of colors on the distant summits and in deep cuts of the ragged mountain sides, and the twist of airy banners of rainbow tints from many a peak. And the waters wash, wash, with melody divine; and the banners float out in wild rapture; and the clouds are illumined; and the sky overhead is full of light, while the valley lies glooming almost into night; and Tahoe is black; and the pines are sunk to sleep; and deep ravines in remote heights change colors moment by moment,—sometimes purples, sometimes pink as wild-rose petals, sometimes crimsons, sometimes orange, and gently wafting from one to another as if some subtle wind blew them; and through all, the white peaks of snow flashed strange and bewildering: the Alpine glow tarried, and tried to reclaim the dusk from the dark. By and by all the west light had shaded away to gloom, and every hint of prismatic color had vanished from moun-

FLOAT DOUBLE, MOUNT AND SHADOW

tain-top or mountain-side, and the hollow where the lake lay tuning its constant lute was blind with darkness. Then the gentle stars stepped out and across the heavens, till every star was lit: and the lake became a sky of undulant stars, as if a strong wind had blown the firmament into a wavelike beat. The milky way strewed its far-going streets with silver dust; and to believe I saw angels walking on that shimmering pavement was not a caprice, but a necessity. O angels of the dusk, walking slow to the tune of heavenly melody along this street silver-paved, going we know not where, but whither ye know,—O angels, have ye mountains like ours in your fair skies, and deep shadows of growing night and quiet between the lights where rest cometh infinite and sweet?

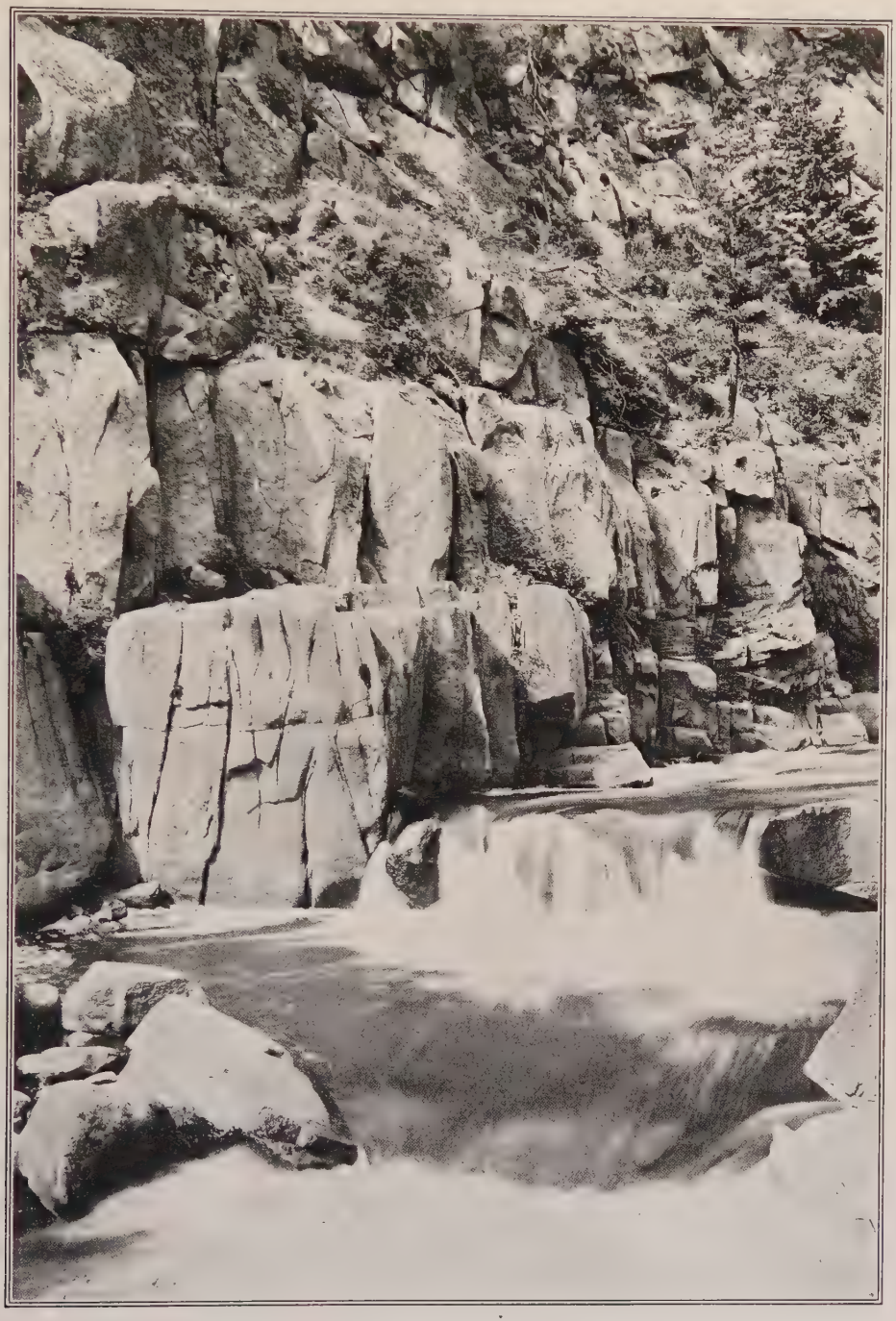
In tall mountains, where perpetual winter bars doors against all comers, the avalanche "mews his mighty youth." Snows fall silent, restful, harmless as a smile, until the rude mountain has his shoulders and breast snow-bound, and all his streams are hid as in a dungeon, and the pines, if they grow so high, bend or break under their weight of winter, and the great creases in the mountain are ironed out; until, to one looking from some superior eminence, nothing is perceptible save this,—a quiet which might invade eternity. All is at rest. Not a feather drops from a passing wing. All wings seem folded. Here rest the wearied mountains, calm as

> "The Sabbath of eternity,
> One Sabbath deep and wide."

No tumult intrudes. The benediction of "Now abideth peace" must have been pronounced above these Sabbath heights—when, with a leap wild and despairing, a whole mountain-side plunges downward, a frenzy of motion and death! all peace is dead: here is resistless ruin. The avalanche lurches, crushes, mangles, bears down forests as if they were blades of grass, suffers no impediment, hurls

villages to their graves, swirls savagely like a tortured sea, lunges downward, downward, till wrath is burnt out; and then settles down to its original calm, as if no devastation had been wrought. Mountains nurture such things, like themselves, sublime. No usual things need think to find habitations in these stupendous ranges in which continents ridge themselves. Where the Himalayas look down in calm disdain on all the earth, sneer at the sea, scout at the wide rivers, frown at the clouds, make summers afraid, call to the edelweiss, "Stay yonder where I bid you;" will not let the Alpine rose flower save one lone blossom; insult the sunlight, saying, "You can not thaw these snow banks: they are mine; sneer at men who think to climb their pinnacles; hide pitfalls for them; bite them with their frosts; crush them in their icefalls; bury them in their crevasses,—these mountains own their sky. Somewhere men can not invade. Niagaras may be led blind like old Samson to the mill; but the eternal mountains set barriers against which all strivings seem as helpless as frost on window-panes. And how forbidding such mountains are! I recall that one of the Napoleonic medals celebrating the passage of the Alps pictures the mountain as a giant of imposing frame, sitting with knees drawn up to his chin, with knotted, huge hands twisted over them, and so obstructing the path armies or man would take; sits there terrific, Giant Despair of the impassable mountains. When he depicted the mountain so, the artist had a vision. The heavy, set face bearded, the shoulders stooped, impregnable he seems, and is. So the mountains are crouched, stooped, resentful of intrusion, fortressed for the thousand years with winters and with avalanche and storms. The forbidding mountains!

And these sullen heights near to the stars, yet careless of them, are brothers of the fertile valleys, and are makers of the rivers which swim out to the far deltas, and make harbors for the hammered ships, and roadways inland for the



THE RUGGED ROCKS

racing tides. Mountains are growing rivers on those barren winter uplands; and these rivers are slaking the thirst of the plains, and growing interminable forests, and doing numberless generosities; and these recluse mountains, after all, are democratic, and makers and sharers of the gladness of the world. The mountain leads a life of service; and service is divine. How all great rivers are mountain begotten, is ever to me a heartening thought. Nile, Amazon, Rhone, Rhine, Susquehanna, Ohio, Sacramento, Missouri, —whence come ye? and they are clamant, "From the mountains." Mountain born! These lonely, lordly, exclusive, uncondescending mountains, cold, even fierce, are neighbors of the cattle herd and the cottage and the child. And is it not good to consider how the whole world is ours; how all things contribute to other things; how the trees are nest-place for the bird, and the wild bee carries pollen on his dusty wings to fertilize the flowers; and how the soil grows forests; and how forests, in their turn, do not impoverish, but enrich the soil; and how seas lift into the sky, and send argosies of clouds to make the remote inlands, which never so much as heard there was a sea, to glow with harvests and shine out with blossoming and fruiting orchards; and how the mountains contribute to the ocean, and construct Niagaras and Yosemites? Nothing liveth to itself,—that is very sure and full of comfort. And from their stately thrones the mountains watch their rivers flowing through thousands of miles, and making lands habitable and flowers to lift

A MOMENT'S QUIET

their morning faces; and mountains watch their rivers coming to the sea, and, as they watch, rejoice.

Three of our American mountain folk are right worthy of their habitation,—the ouzel, the mountain sheep, the eagle. I name the ouzel in this companionship because he frequents the waterfalls far up against the shining, icy precipice of the glaciers. He is not daunted by their altitiude. What lures this bird so high above the clouds and on the frontiers of perpetual winter, no one can guess, save that he has been invited here of God. Suffice it that hither he comes. Not the stormy-petrel or the skylark are more intoxicating to the imagination. The ouzel is stream-born.

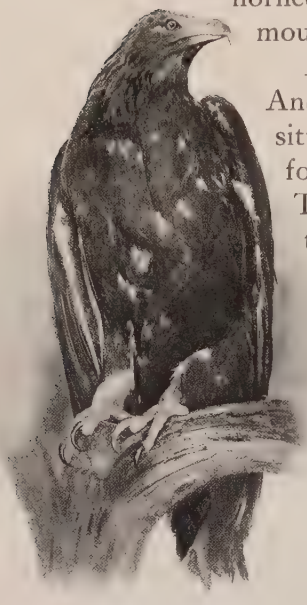
THE OUZEL'S HAUNT

His nest is on some leafage continuously sprayed by the shining waterfall. He lives amidst the torrents. He feeds on stream bottoms. Rapids and waterfalls, with their white sheets of beating cascade, are his delight. His song leaps like a star into the sky. Living generally and strangely quite alone, his song never ceases. Winters mar not his mirth. Storms are his joy, if so be his beloved stream is at hand. His flight is always along waterways, and though the stream be only a few feet in width, he wings his sinuous way so as to always be so his shadow

may be in the shining stream. His flight runs straight up the vertical leap of a waterfall. Water wakes his flight and song. He is reveler, and dwells amidst the iridescent spray of singing waterfalls. His home is there; his joy is there. Where waters dash from rock to rock or slip down sheer inclines with a swish like winter grasses when answering to a wind, there you shall find this bird of the mist. Where rainbow from the falls lifts its dazzling arch, this bird of promise, with happy note and rapturous flight, laughs in and out as if the rainbow and the stream had found a bird-form and a voice.

The mountain sheep is our most adventurous mountaineer. I confess to being proud of him. The timidity characteristic of domestic sheep is far removed from him. He is bold as a viking. He has no trepidation, no hesitation. Fear and he have never met. Born in uplands twelve thousand feet in the sky, where the winds blew shrilly across miles of snowy range, he pastures in all but inaccessible altitudes, stays where the clouds shelter him from the lowland, climbs precipices no mountaineer skill could touch, goes where no hunter can follow, without the courtesy of a hesitant look leaps chasms which seems impassable, springs over cliffs one hundred and fifty feet in height, not one adventurous spirit but a whole flock one after the other in order, like soldiers making a charge, neither daunted, nor yet aware that any high deed is being done. His feet are padded so that he can cling to what appears a glassy surface of unscalable rock, and fords fierce mountain torrents, leaping unconcernedly from rock to rock slippy with dashing waters; standing in this churn of spray with a look of unconcern in the eyes which marks him kinsman of the eagle and the winds. This Rocky Mountain sheep is tutelar deity of the grim mountain fastnesses, where waters snarl and winds blow gales that never know the solace of a calm. What a poor god Pan was, compared with this mountain diety of ours, this scorner of the lowlands, this

harmless but fearless brother to the mountain cliff and the mountain torrent and the mountain cloud! The fleet chamois does not impress my imagination as this huge, horned, sure-footed, fleet, care-free scion of the mountain and storm.



A GOLDEN EAGLE

And mountains have their eagles. The Andes have their condors, huge-winged things, sitting on a far peak of some Chimborazo; but for me, eagles are the wings of the mountains. This bird belongs here. Mountains have right to such exponency as his. His daring flight makes nothing of acclivities men can not scale. An eagle does not know mountain or height; his flight flings shadow on them all, as if to signify ownership. The clouds shot through and through with bolts of fire are his as well as theirs. Those who have filled the eagle's talons with thunderbolts were not misinformed. They saw him when he took a fistful of the arrows of the storm, and held them against his day of battle. On some mountain ledge which only wings can climb, there he builds his house against the dawn. There his brood shrills. There he flings wings to welcome back the light. There he lifts his weird cry, unmusical but terrible. There he spreads his slow flight. Thence, like a thunderbolt, he falls. There he climbs the sky to teach the mountains they have not mastered the art of climbing to the heavens. I have watched an eagle climb the blue dome with never a flutter of pinion, just by downward and upward slide, as if too indolent to use the prodigious rowing of his wings, but moving upward, upward, till he is a speck above the mountain snows; then that dim speck was lost, and then, from his invisible fields of air, I have seen him plunge down through thousands of feet, past mountain precipice and snow and pine, and cleansing water

course and flocks of clouds, in his terrific flight, till, I could answer for it, he would dash him in pieces on the yellow rocks below, only to see him curb his headlong, ruinous rush, and sail tranquilly up against the azure, past some ledge on his far aerie, and bathe him again in the wide blue sky. Mountain, the eagle is thine; and eagle, the mountain is thine—two majesties, two aspirations, two despairs.

How beautiful the lesser mountains are! If they fail in sublimity, they are passing rich in beauty. The Catskills, the Alleghanies, the Tennessee Mountains, the Adirondacks, the mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire, and the Berkshire Hills,—could any one go among them and not love them? The roll on roll of hills, the climbing mountains brown with shadows of blessed trees from base to top, green, with rivulets trickling down, and brooks laughing aloud, and valleys each with its own rivulet or river, and winding roads nosing around as if playing "Eye-Spy," and bolder mountains lifting up their facades; and when Autumn fades, all those green valleys and mountains are glorious with golden topaz and carbuncle and jacinth tints. Such things God does among his lesser mountains. Where does more comfort keep open house

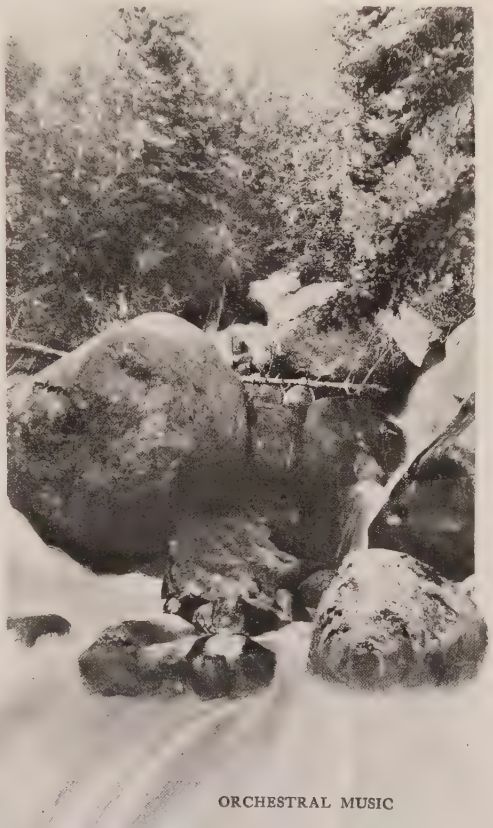
A PLACID RIVER

than in the New England mountains, where meadows lie knit into the texture of the landscape, and hillsides are packed with pines through whose serpent roots the rollicking water-brooks go with much laughter, to lose themselves for a half hour among meadow grasses, and so get rest for another race down some ravine too steep for climbing, but just right for mountain brooks going down hill. Such fun streams have among the hills. Such joy the hills have in their streams, through which the darting of speckled trout, swift as the light though their dartings are, can be seen through waters which look crystal, as if they were liquified air. And the mountains wave their stately crests as in solemn welcome to whosoever cometh from the sweaty cities to these hills of help; and care looses the grip of its cruel fingers, while the waters ring their silver bells, and hills cast their shadows westward at morning and eastward at night, and the landscape—tree, and mountain, and meadow, and purling brook, and waterfall, and helpful shadow and steep incline, and moss-grown rocks, and fallen pines, and lakelets hid away too modest for the sun—conspires to give the weary heart a holiday.

What days of delight I have passed among English hills! How the Lake Country has enticed me! How the long swell of wavelike mountain leading from Grasmere on toward the sea, has filled me with solemn gladness when along the sky, looking for the sea, hummocks have stood up, peering like a woman watching for her sailor making signal from his boat. And when I saw these watchers first, I made mental note that I had never seen just that sweet perversity of nature. This was exclusively the possession of this dear English Lake region, where the Indian Summer of Wordsworth's presence never lifts; but one day

MOUNTAIN POPPIES

in Oklahoma, going along, not thinking of English hills, I saw the Wichita Mountains building peaks blue as a distant sea, and to my surprise and gladness, there, seen afar, were watcher hummocks which might have been mistaken for those hills across the sea. And, I have pondered much on God's kindly multitude of beauties, how He turns His kaleidoscope, and the landscapes reshape themselves into new forms of surprise and loveliness. He will not let us grow sleepy with fatigue of sameness. He has felicity of loveliness which puts us outdoor folk into the mood of poetry. What gray days of delight have I experienced in the Scotch mountains, trudging all the day through a steady pour of highland rain, when lochs were shrouded in clouds and every ben wore fogs like a tartan about his breast! A—journey across the sagging moors where the Highland cattle graze careless of the rain, and the solitary shepherd, girt with his plaid, walks along the hills, himself a figure carved from the mist, and his flock scattered about him like rags of the fog, and the slow wreaths of smoky, absorbing mists lie along the ben ridges, or cloud them utterly, or cut summit from base, or leave the top suspended in mid-air, cut off from any visible support, —I could see the "ghosties" tramping from the misty hills.



ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Streams among the rugged, lofty mountains are fountains of unfailing delight. The wild leap, the boulders big enough to make an English hill, the profuse neglect where the brook's course is interrupted by innumerable boulders thrown helter-skelter, not to the brook's undoing but to its evident sincere delight. How the waters crumple against these hundred rocks in such laughter as not to be able to see which way to run! Shrill voices lift and shout in many a key, like children's voices. Here are pools of sunlight, waters that burnish the rocks, rocks that each give a separate ledge for waterfall, joined boulders which press the stream into narrow channels for a moment for the fun of seeing the spurt when the water races from its cramped quarters to where it can spread out into broad shallows, displaying pebbles as if they were multicolored gems inviting the sunlight to lave them and the waters to love them, and the brook gathers in dark pools under rocks and under the distorted roots of pine, with a black pine leaning boldly above them. To wade barefoot in a brook like this! Let me not talk of this lest I drop the pencil and trudge off incontinently to the mountain where the brooks are calling me, and the sunlit water dimples on the roseate rocks, and the shag of climbing rocks goes heavenward like soldiers scaling a fortress; and the canyon shuts its two huge hands close together so that the sun never gets to kiss the waters in the stream; and the call of the waters is like the clamor of voices of our disappearing yesterdays. Barefoot in the mountain streams, where the waters swirl about your ankles and tickle your legs with their spider-webs of ripple, and your halloo brings a troop of echoes, and the sky is squeezed together into a blue thatch above you, and you laugh as you wade setting naked feet daintily: for the rocks are jagged and one's feet are little schooled to such closeness of contact with nature. Or to sit on a sunny boulder, with feet hanging down into the glistering waters! Really I think I would soon turn

A MOUNTAIN GATEWAY

into a Nereid (a man Nereid, to be sure), if I were often found wading mountain streams where bold peaks climb and front the universe of stars.

It was Summer. Down where men dwelt, the city sweltered. The tropics had moved north. Streets were baked like burnt bread. People boiled or broiled. I did both; and having, as I thought, had my share, and hearing the mountain and the mountain streams calling my name in persistent and persuasive tones, I came. Past foothills and green fields hemming the mountains, up through armies of rocks which had no freedom and could not march into the upper fields of air and moutain-ingratiating shadows, I climbed steadily, joyously, along a mountain river. The dusty road wandered along the dustless stream. When I felt the blister of heat, and thought me of my much boiling and much broiling on the plain, I stepped from the dusty road to the shining river, and, lying flat, drank and drank, not because I was thirsty, but because I had been thirsty; and this was a mountain stream laughing, lurching, and offering drink for the fun of it. All day I marched, like a soldier under orders, along the upward-climbing river. What dear madrigals the river sang to me I will not tell. That is a privacy. But what songs they were, and how I hear them now! And the burnt rocks crept close and wrinkled their lips; but the river sang, not heeding their surliness; and the mountain climbed. So did the river. So did I. The sun stood at noon. The heat was fierce; but the river was cool and rejoicing, and the

THE MORNING LIGHT

rocks afforded shadow inviting for a tired man, and the shadow was like wine: but as afternoon jogged on, the shadows left the rocks and crept into the road, and tossed clouds along the stream, although its waves were sunny and songful as before; and the mountain shadows filled the gorge until all sunlight was put to flight and the evening came. I camped for the night at a bend of the stream. The mountains were yellow as Autumn leaves. A grass plot, soft, cool, inviting, rimmed my side of the water. My camp was at the elbow of the river where it turned suddenly up an unexpected gorge. A boulder high as my head made a table fit for the Argonauts. A fallen pine, prone but not uprooted, lay sprawled full length along the river edge, beautiful, fragrant, delicious with the darkness gathered in its branches while light was abundant in the sky. Just where the river turned up the gorge it took a run and jump of about four feet, making great laughter and abundant music. The mountains closed in on every side, and climbed eager for the rising of the moon. What a place to camp! The singing river, the prone pine, the yellow rocks, the swish of waters laving the naked rocks, the slow wind crooning among the pines, the stream for a wash-dish and the stream for a drinking cup (spots changed, as becometh a Christian, not using the same spot to drink in and to wash in), scant pines pluming the ascending yellow rocks, air a balm of spicery and mountain cleanness, mountain poppies fallen asleep early, clean tired out. Supper is had cooked on the rock, with pine-wood fire, fragrance oozing out and sparkles shooting out. A pine fire amidst mountains on a summer night, and the incense of dead forests mixing with the incense of living forests, and the exhilarance of mountain air while a mountain river sang!

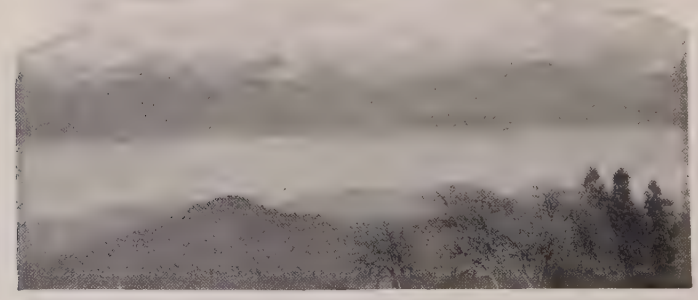
BANNERED WITH CLOUD

Under what happy conjunction of stars must I have been born! And the night set in. The world is remote. I have forgotten it. I lie under the stars. No tent for a lover of mountains. Let him use the sky for a coverlid, and the stars for candles, and the fragrant pine fire for holy nard. I lie alongside the fallen pine, with its branches touching me as they sway. My head is near and toward the waterfall, so that not one of its rejoicing voices was lost to my heart. The sentinel pines climbing the rocks, stood silhouetted against the sky. Clouds cluttered across the heavens. Stars winked through the half-closed shutters of the clouds. The wind amongst the chasms was as a strong man taking long breaths. The solemn mountains were fast asleep, but very noble in their slumbers, with broad shoulders erect, on which stars might rest if they grew weary in the night, and on which eager dawns were free to stand tiptoe if they would. To fall asleep seemed a crime. Such nights in such places were meant for waking, not for sleeping. By and by the slow moon climbed the east. The eastern rock-row of black mountain won a halo of palpitating silver; then the lunar shield flashed out above the serried blackness; then gentle light illumined the western mountain-tops, and stole down stealthily toward the river, calling to the moonlight, "Come, O come!" I lie and watch. The clouds grew

THE GLACIER

tired, and went to bed like the poppies. The stream and I and the moonlight staid awake: but in due time I succumbed to the flute-song of the waterfall, and heard this music dimly, and saw the moonlight wasting to a silver haze, and sleepily said my prayer: "I thank Thee, O God of the out-of-doors, that Thou art in the mountains; and I am with them and Thee. Hear my voice mixed with the music of Thy waterfalls, and think of my prayer as if it were a song to Thee whom I love to bless for this great mercy of the mountain and mountain music and shadow, and moonlight and mystery. Thee I love and bless." And the stream chanted, "He heareth prayer." And I was in happy sleep. And God was with me till the dawn.

Mountains blue, dreamy, remote, compounded as of earth and air, white as built of summer cloud, builded with the massive masonry of God, tranquil, masterful, compelling wonder, watched by the stars, abundant in waterfalls, glorious in strength, battlemented for sunsets, crowned with noons, steeped in dawns, the expectation of the lowlands, a rest for care, heights to which dying eyes lift their last, longing, homesick look before they front the mountains of eternity,—mountains, pray you, build your sublime ranges along the western landscape of the heart, so that, as we look, sunsets shall revel on your snowy crests, and your long shadows shall walk from sky to sky, and we shall hear at burning noon or quiet evening or the windy morn the calling of the mountains, "Let us journey together to the sky."



THE ETERNAL MOUNTAINS

IT IS RAINING

DARK

TO-DAY

IT IS RAINING

READY TO RAIN

It is raining. All the sky is gray as wood-ashes. Clouds are not hung in streamers as on an April day, blown full and free by the wind, but one lonely, endless cloud blots out the entire blue. Through the whole vault, horizon to zenith and back to horizon again, is not a leakage of sunlight; no crevice in the mist through which a spry sunbeam may slip; no, the rain-cloud owns the sky. It is raining. Winds have fallen asleep or gone for a holiday. For days a gale has been blowing the dust till the sky seemed like a dusty road. The finer gravels spit spitefully in your face. Tree-tops bent steadily from the wind as if to shelter themselves. Every loose thing took to itself wings. The tumble-weeds went across lots as if running a race for a prize and are piled up drift-deep in the fence-corner by the woods. People said, "The wind will never quit blowing," which was a gratuitous untruth; for the wind always has quit blowing when it had blown to its content. After days of this wild ownership of the world by rioting winds, long

wisps of cloud began to drift far up in the sky above the reach of the winds, drifting against them as in feminine independence (perhaps they were women clouds), then these veils thickened slowly with no approach to haste, like a woman dressing (they *are* female clouds, that is certain), until one evening, along the skyline at the west, a cloud black, impenetrable, tempestuous, foreboding, lay as if anchored, while up across the heavens skulked a long, gray shadow, chilling to look at and suggestive of rain. An hour later the sun drifted down out of the thick-hazed sky, where it had been hanging, like a blood-stained shield, into the dull gloom of the black cloud-bank; and there was no sunset that night. The sun had been befogged like a traveler caught on the Manx moors in the mists.

And darkness came on steadily. There were no stars anywhere; and the violent winds folded their hands in quiet; and the air began to smell of rain; and somebody said aloud—it was a child—"There 's a rain-drop;" and he spoke truly; and the night is come; and the slow rain begins its placid falling. It is raining. And all the evening through, all the night through into dull morning, on to noon, now into afternoon, it is raining.

IT IS RAINING

How good the rain is to hear, and how good the rain is to feel! Which is better, I can not tell. They are twin perfections. Such as think being out in the rain a hardship are to be pitied. Birds and trees and flowers stay out in the rain, and like it. Why not? This is their wash-day. Without the trouble of suds and rinsing, they grow clean. They are frugal about washing up. Dirt becomes them as it does a child. But when the rain comes, then all the flowers have their faces washed whether or no. Some of them are like children misliking to be clean, and fold their petals up and hide their faces from the wet fingers of the rain; but all this childish subterfuge profits them nothing. Rain washes their faces whether or no, some way or other. I do not profess to know how. This is nature's cleaning day. And the trees all stand up, bravely facing the rain, and feel the better for it,—be it a wild ducking like the spite of the rain—for even rain has its tantrums like little people—or the slow gentle fall as the drops were autumn leaves careless of falling. Trees love the rain. This is part of their summer gladness. They are never glum when rain comes drifting through their multitudinous leaves, making music. And when the sun breaks out on a brilliant morning after rain, how the leaves shine like a schoolboy with morning face (as quaint Will Shakespeare phrases it). Trees are good friends with the rain. And did you never see a robin rejoice in the rain, and hold up his crimson waist-coat (for robins are princely dressers like Sir Walter Raleigh), to be washed of the rain into a brighter crimson? 'T is a sight to make one sing; and it does make the robin sing. He is having his best clothes laundered without a cent of cost. Slight wonder if he is tickled over that. Some of the rest of us would be too. And often have I heard him, when the rain was dousing him as from a pitcher, shout out in clamorous delight with his liquid note full of mirth and jollity, "O goody-goody-goody-goody, rain! O goody-goody-

goody!" and then flirt away with his bright coal of a breast flung against the rainy sky; for this coal not a drenching rain even can put out.

Who am I and who are you to shun the rain when trees and flowers and birds are made merry by it, and never think of shelter? No; it is good to be out in the rain, and the bigger the rain the more fun to be out. When from your chin and nose and ears and the point of every lonesome finger you possess, and from your solemn thumbs, solemn being lonesome, water drips as from a wood-house eaves, then you do feel good. To rush for shelter when rain comes softly down may do for the well-dressed and the fashionable; but for us who wear every-day clothes, being out in the rain is fun. We have no clothes to spoil, and we will not wilt, so give us the open field or prairie or woods, the leaking woods, and then let rain work at its job. We mean business just as much as the rain does. To be out on a wide stretch of prairie, green beyond any word of comparison, and hear the steady falling of the rain, and see the beaded grasses bend and the continuous motion of the quivering spears, and the rain keeps falling steadily, and we be wet as the grass and as green,—what a lark this is! How good to be out in the rain! Or to be in the woods while the sound of the rain drifts through the tree-tops its steady insistency of music, and the wet leaves hold the rain as long as they can, and then spill handfuls of water down on your pow as if to drive you away from their neighborhood, or a gust of wind comes to show itself not wholly superannuate nor passive, and the trees shake a whole cloudful of rain upon you, drenching you to the skin! They scorn us; but we are good woodsmen, and care not for these pranks of wind or trees or rain. To be truthful, we love their pranks. They are only funning. We are not to be run out of these woods; and, besides, we own them. And shall we be driven from our own wilderness? Can we not stay on

lands deeded to us and those deeds, moreover, recorded at a price? Be it far from us to be driven from our own premises by the whimsies of our own out-of-doors. No; let the rain and the winds have their fun. We will have ours. We like jokes too. We are clad in bark as well as these trees, and can shed water. Let the rain come faster, harder, increasing from drizzle to torrent. Let it rain. Selah! And to walk through drenching undergrowth of the woods, when every green blade and shrub-leaf, and wild gooseberry-leaf and fruit, are sagging in pendants of lustrous diamonds, and the moss on fallen trees shines up like a green flower, and the flowers stand in sweet array with clean garments and faces, and to hear the blue jay cry with raucous voice, "What are you doing here?" and to lunge through all this, and come to the pasture where cattle keep browsing when the rain is falling, and so getting drink thrown in with their dinner; and they will stop and look at you with solemn eyes asking, "Who are you anyway, and why are you out in the rain?" And then, without a touch of hospitality, they are eating with never a thought of asking you to share in their repast. But to see a little calf chewing its cud in the rain! Aye, that is comfort. Ruminating is the dictionary word, but chewing cud is the cow's word, and I stick to the vernacular and the cow. I am a plain man. Doubtless the cow is the original tobacco-chewer, but she never smokes, and despises cigarettes; but chewing is, beyond a doubt, settled habit with her. I have seen cows mid-Atlantic, the wind blowing guns, deck drenched under feet of brackish water, and the wide-eyed, meadow-breathed cows chewing, caring for none of these things. Yes; I see little show of reforming such inveterate chewers, though I

THE CARELESS CATTLE

will not put it beyond some of our reforming friends to attempt the job. But I will none of their folly. I like to see cows chew. It is better that they endlessly chew than that they endlessly talk; and I hold to the lesser evil. When cows chew incessantly, and rain-clouds rain without intermission, this is industry and devotion to duty. It is raining.

However foolish this remark may seem, I am compelled to say that when the rain hints at quitting, I grow nervous. I want no quitting yet. Rain suits me. I want its music to continue and its downpour to proceed. Not but I know that rain ought to quit sometimes; but I like its continuance, and have ridden all day along Scotch moors with never an umbrella, the cold rain spilling steadily on me as discharging a religious duty, and water taking its leisure way down my spinal column, and bringing to me only an aqueous delight in the adaptation of myself to my environment.

And lying in a hay-mow on the scented hay, with roof only a foot or two above your head, and the rain pattering softly on the shingles, what can be conjured up with more of the open fields in it? The prairies under you, the grim skies over you, and the liquor of the rainy day drugging your sense of work as with a healthful narcotic, and the whole world shut away from you by the downpour of the rain, and the rain on the roof sweeter than orchestras! O heart, say, it is raining.

And to stand at an open door and listen to the dripping from the eaves. Water-spouts are a utilitarian waste. They savor not of poetry, but belong to an inode of the

GETTING READY FOR RAIN

practical. Give me the dripping of the roof—the slow, steady, insistent, delicious drip, drip, drip; and if a rain-barrel be anywhere about, the dropping is the very spirit of music, like bell-ringers from the Alps with diminutive silver bells. The drip from eaves at night is best. Then open the door, blow out the light, sit in an old chair, and thrust hand out to get a share of the dripping from the roof, and then drift back to dreams. The dull, dark skies, the whine of an occasional spurt of wind, the steady splash, splash of the eaves as if it were God's

> "Keeping time, in a sort of runic rhyme,
> With the tintinnabulation of the bells."

RAIN ON THE ROOF

And a rainy day for reading. A good book and a rainy day! What a conjunction of happy stars. When I first read "A Tale of Two Cities" it was so. Sydney Carton and the echoing footsteps, and Lucie Manette and her white-haired, Bastile-bruised old father, and Evremond, and the beating of the Bastile down, and the frightful whine of the guillotine, and Sydney Carton learning to be a man because of love and his "It is better so,"—in the rain and near the roof. What a day to read that was! I shall have memories of it forever, I doubt not. All day long the rain fell steadily, not a hint of stopping, and "The Tale of Two Cities" I met for the first time, though not for the last. Glooms were the atmosphere for that book, and to this day when I take it up, as I often do, I can hear the rain upon the windows dripping wearily. A book and a rainy day.

But night with rain upon the roof is positive poetry.

Pan with his reed is no myth then. The rain on the roof is poet-laureate for the lonely. When I was a lad I slept in a room apart from the house where the family dwelt, and above the roof were arms of gnarled oaks. I did not know it then, although I know it now, that this was better than a palace chamber for such as love to lie and dream. I was alone with the night and the winds and the rain. How I lay awake and dreamed! I knew not the world. My hands were hard with handling hoe and plow; and poetry was a thing I knew barely by name; but the rain on the roof was there. I listened to it, and my heart drank in its music. Its haunting loneliness knew to make me weep, I not knowing why the weeping. God was having a word in private with me, though I truly knew not who was talking. It was raining,—that was all. Great loneliness ingulfed me, but I feared not the depths of this tideless sea. The rain falling, falling, I grew to look for with a hungry heart; and years after, I knew this as the summons of poetry. Riley heard this rain, and whispered,

"The rain above, and a mother's love,
And God's companionship,"

RAINING YET

though the mother's love was a mercy I never knew. A poet has caught the music of the rain upon the roof. The rain dripped into his heart—Coates Kinney's "Rain on the Roof:"

"When the humid shadows hover
Over all the starry spheres,
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,
What a joy to press the pillow
Of a cottage chamber bed,
And to listen to the patter
Of the soft rain overhead!

Every tinkle on the shingles
Has an echo in the heart,
And a thousand dreamy fancies
Into busy being start;
And a thousand recollections
Weave their air-threads into woof,
As I listen to the patter
Of the rain upon the roof.

There is naught in art's bravuras
That can work with such a spell
In the spirit 's pure, deep fountains,
Whence the holy passions swell,
As that melody of nature,
That subdued, subduing strain,
Which is played upon the shingles
By the patter of the rain."

YESTERDAY

And now, a man grown, I haunt a garret where I may hear the rain upon the roof. I am not free from its haunting yet. That haunting will go with me till I die. I must have the drift of the rain and the moan of the wind, the pathetic grieving as for sins forgiven indeed of God, but unforgotten of the sinning soul; the weird wistfulness, like eyes that look for a desolated hearth. I must hear the grieving of the autumn rain. It is part of the literature of my life, without which I stand an-hungered.

It is raining. Gray clouds are anchored in the sky; the raindrops wrinkle down the window-panes; the voices of rain are in the skies, indescribable for sweetness. A thing not to be put into any words, nor capable of having music written to interpret its melody, only to those who have heard and loved the rainfall and the gray, grim sky, to such alone will this saying be a phrase to conjure with, "It is raining."

FOREVER

BIRD'S-NESTING

A BIRD'S NEST IN BLOOM

READY FOR THE BIRDS

BIRD'S-NESTING

THIS NEST IS TAKEN

THINK you this sounds wicked? Judge not, as says the Scripture. Wait a spell. I think it one of the bounden duties, one of the set proprieties of the year, to go after birds' nests. This habit set on me as a boy; and I have it yet. In my quest is no acrimony, no tinge of brutality. I seek no eggs (except hen's eggs). I steal no birdlings, but am tenderhearted as any girl toward all living things. Murder is not one of my propensions. When a snake crosses my path, or I his, I neither chase nor kill him. He has his life, I mine. He does not harm me: I will not harm him. Albeit I confess to having an antagonistic feeling toward him for his behavior to my ancestress, mother Eve. That was both an unchivalrous and a scurvy trick he played her. Manifestly the snake is no gentleman, or he had not deliberately decoyed an unsuspecting woman. The snake is repugnant to me because of his breach in gentility. But I do not molest him. Let him take his snaky way through the grasses. I gladly give a caterpillar a lift on his road to his silken palace, there to wait till God shall send him forth no longer a worm to crawl on the pavement, but a butterfly to dance on laughing wings through summer skies. I would not harm wasps, though their ways are not to my liking. To keep the major part of one's body for war is neither religion nor courtesy. However, the wasp thinks himself a consequential personage;

and if he leaves me alone, I leave him alone. In my blood is no Ishmaelite tendency. My hand is against nobody and no creature save the mosquito, who is my hereditary foe. He is always armed to the teeth; and an armed neutrality is all a body can have by way of truce with this outrageous cannibal.

But birds, I like them all. Even the cuckoo, too lazy to build a nest for herself or sit on her own eggs, her I will enjoy, because hers is one of the early voices of Spring; and the mellow "cuck-oo, cuck-oo," is pervasive melody to my ears. The cow-bird, fat, gluttonous, though I love not, I endure. He has wings. That saves his bacon in my estimation. Winged things compel my admiration. I envy their covenant with the skies; and when they drop like a withered leaf from the blue uplands of air, I make my obeisance as to the dusk with its stars. No, I am no marauder. The bushwhacker instinct is not in my blood, though my ancestors were of the viking brood. I go bird's-nesting as I say my prayers, with a humble heart, but with much gladness.

October is my pet month for bird's-nesting; and does not this exonerate me from cruel intent? Are not nests

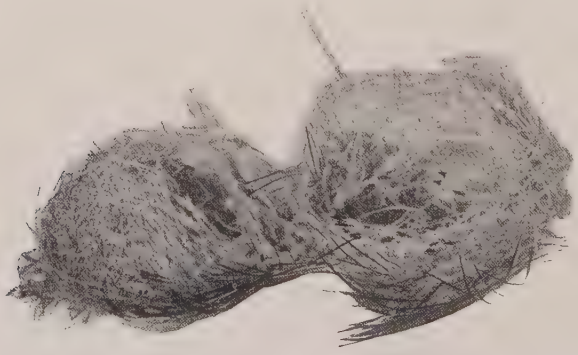
I HEAR A CATBIRD CALL

empty, and are not the birdies gone, and are they not flown to some radiant land of summer unknowing leaf-fall? The nests are crowded now, not with diminutive eggs, nor yet with garrulous, hungry-voiced small-fry, but with withered leaves lying sedate and silent, voiceless as the sleeping dead? No; I profess this is no viciousness nor any malice, only a trick of boyhood not spilled from my soul. Please God, may I keep my boyhood while I live, nor lose it when I die. This is a belonging I must not be quit of. It is part of my permanent luggage; scuffed with travel and scarred with many stickers, like grips which have seen foreign parts, but my luggage; scuffed with bad usage I deny not, but my luggage still, to which I stick as I would to a child's hand on a midnight road. Boys yet! The month for bird's-nesting is come.

ONE LONE LEAF

But any time is a good time for bird's-nesting. Summer is good if a body has settled morals in such outdoor affairs. To go and break up families is never good. To go and see families is always good, though not always opportune. It does no bird harm for you or me to spy out her nest and pry around in neighborly inquisitiveness about her domestic establishment, if we are honest folk who tend to our own business and know where neighborly nosing around stops and intrusion begins. For me, I am upright in character and genteel in behavior. To tear a bird's house down, or carry off her eggs or her brood, is not neighborly, gentlemanly, nor righteous. Such conduct violates all codes save that of buccaneers. But to go in Spring or Summer, and prod around in thickets or big trees or orchards or under bridges where swallows build and phœbes nest, or climb trees to take a glad peep at

eggs in a nest yet warm with the heat lent by a wee bird breast; to look, and go on about your business, and let birds go on about theirs,—such conduct interferes with no code of morals. And if the nest chance to be one which for its beauty or rarity, novelty or intricacy, you care to be owner of, mark where you saw it, and when bird and family have moved out, then you may return and take the dainty thing you looked upon to care to possess, and violate no commandment of any decalogue. To go snooping around in nature's dooryard or pasture is legitimate and commendable. Snooping generally is a poor enough occupation; but with Nature, because of her excess of reticence, this is the one way of finding out things. "Blessed are the snoopers around," is one of nature's Beatitudes. The nosers around are such as become finders-out. Nature never tells anybody anything. All who have found out are those who hung around, and, maybe, heard Nature talking in her sleep or to herself while wide awake, not knowing anybody was near, or saw her hiding things or finding things, as you may see some squirrel looking for nuts themselves have hid away. I must say that Nature puts a premium on snooping and eavesdropping. The Audubons and Wilsons and Agassizs were hangers around as bad as boys at a country grocery. You can not find things out by driving up as for a party, and, with polished



EMPTY

shoes and looking-glass shirt-front and cutaway coat, white kerchief drawn daintily across your immaculate linen, and high hat shiny as your shoes, go along the sidewalk and get in an elegant trap, and thus find out Nature's goings on. No, O no; you must put on your old clothes, roll up your trousers, tie a handkerchief around your neck, get a stick out of the woods (a dead one is best), and hike out. Do n't hurry. Take no watch. You can tell twelve, noon, by your stomach; you can tell night by your sunset, morning by the crowing of the roosters, and night by the witching stars. Then out across lots.

What fun I had one May-day in Western Kansas, when the sun shone hot, and the skies were burnished, and things were growing on the run, and the day decoyed fishermen out by wagon-loads! Everybody looked fishy. Every creek bend had its pocket crowded with fisher folks. And I went out, ostensibly to fish, authentically to hunt birds' nests. So I prodded my pole into a moist bank, let the cork nod on the stream, and went on about my business. What hours I spent! I leaned out over the stream to get a last-year's nest swinging to a half-submerged willow—the nest as good as new because the Winter had been rainless, and not a blade of grass of which the dainty house is woven was rotted. Every rafter and beam and sill and window-frame in place just as its master and mistress had left it to go South to spend the Winter with relatives. Well, out into the water I swung at the end of a hooked stick, wherewith I hooked me onto the tree along shore, and I leaning and craning and the nest-bush nearly in reach and not quite, and I out of reach of shore and nest, until I called an idle fisherman who had neither fish nor bite, to save my nest and me from a sousing in the stream, which, while unable to furnish fish for the hooks, was still qualified to give a good ducking to any man whose hold on a willow let go and was soused in the water. Fishermen are good for something; *i. e.*, to save birds'-nesters from a drenching.

HERE SWALLOWS SKIM

"Honor to whom honor," is my motto. But what fun! How I pitied the poor fishermen, who caught nothing, not even a cold. I caught both nibble and nest. And how the birds sang, and how the fresh green of the leaves glistened and shook, and how the sky grew cobalt over me, and how the warm south wind laved me as I had been a bit of prairie! Maybe it thought I was, but no matter. It is good to be green: we green things grow. And I came upon a mourning dove upon her nest, with apologies for calling that trick a nest. Usually the dove is a sorry housekeeper. Truth compels me, or I would not say this. Nothing else could induce me. A few sticks jumbled together, that is all. Why, who could think, prior to knowing that so very dainty a bird as this mourning dove, so modest in demeanor, and modestly but beautifully appareled in ash-colored silk touched as the sun glints on it with opalescent flame,—who could think that so elegantly and femininely attired a lady would be slovenly in her housekeeping? However, the only way we can tell about

any woman's housekeeping is by seeing her house, not her. The mourning dove needs to attend a school which teaches how to make home attractive. But bethink me I do recall that this same Mrs. Dove is a gadabout. She is swift of wing. She likes to be on the street. If she were a woman she would spend her day at clubs or at counters. But Mrs. Dove is lovely anyway, housekeeping or no housekeeping. And this day I found her sitting at home, for a wonder, and on her eggs. She looked at me as thinking I did not see her. She judged from my looks that I did not know much (she was a foolish bird), and so I walked straight on, and she sat, sit, or set (I do not know which, but am positive she did one of the three, and am not positive she did not do all three) while I came within a foot of her unblinking eyes, when, with commotion and a whirring of her wings like a north-wind's moan, she rushed past me. There was her nest, not built out of the customary confusion of sticks tousled together as if they had rained down when a wind was blowing hard, but made of hay, prairie-hay, blades of grass with the green of Summer not vanished,—for the hay was well-cured and dinted into breast-shape by the bird's bosom—a few wisps laid in the depression of a decayed trunk broken off where another trunk branched out; and in the slight depression of prairie hay two white eggs shined up at me like a surprise. They were good to see. I saw them; had my gratification of eyes and heart, touched nothing (I have manners), went away whistling. I had a tune at heart, and it had to have vent. And the dove came winging back with slight delay, to find the nest intact and her eggs and nest yet warm, and was satisfied.

THE MOURNING DOVE'S NEST

And one day in August, by a northern lake, I swung out for a day of bird's-nesting. You never fail to get what you want on such a foray as this. Bird's-nests you are not likely

to get when you go into a forest in the Summer. Then it is next to impossible to find nests. You may stumble on to them if your stumbler is good, but that is all. Nests are so few in the woods, and specially in Northern woods where pines grow in profusion. Though you see never a nest, you find what you go for. You and the outdoors meet. You and the sky grow chummy. You and birds eye each other and talk back. You and freedom keep company. Alone with the world of waters, woods, wind, birds, sky,—what a day such a day is anyhow! So out I sauntered, a copy of "As You Like It" in my pocket, to have the Forest of Arden to lounge in if I wanted to, though I needed it not. I was walking in Arden all the bonnie day. Out I sauntered. My shoes were old (they were all I had), my trousers were ditto, my feet frisky as became a boy's going to the woods, the sky blue, the air balmy, everything just right, and I like everything, and outward bound. I strike across a sheep-field to the margin of a river, come to the marge where the long, lush grasses grow and drowse, scare up a crane, which, with mighty oaring of his wings, lifted his body into the sky, where it floated off as disinclined to go far, the fishing was so good; then I tramped down in the wet grasses just enough to get my feet wet enough to show I was not insulated like a telegraph wire,—a bird's-nester must be *en rapport* with the earth—marched along the springy river edge, which answered to my springy step in a way to make a city man tired all the rest of his mortal life of asphalt pavements, felt good, saw the boy and girl out boating on the river, but not making much headway with their boating—for you can not do two things at once well—and then I edge from the river out woodward. A boy comes driving cows, driving some, sooking others, and him I asked if he knew where bird's-nests were, to which interlocution he gave succinct reply "Hau?" This boy will never come to much. The country boy who does not know where a bird's-nes-

is, lacks in sagacity. He will remain small potatoes. How good the air is, not a-blowing but a-breathing. Nature somewhere is herself, taking a good breath. Let her. I walk among more wild-cherry trees than I had ever found in one locality, and their bark is like the glow of a sardine-stone. Wild-cherry bark is beautiful to see and feel; and wild-cherry leaves are dainty as any leaf of the wood, and wild cherries are as if the trees were hung with precious sards till the tree appears a display of jewels in color like a flame. One tree I saw green and tall and widespreading, and hung full of fruit, and trailed over by a wild grapevine hung to big green clusters. What a thing of delight that thing of beauty was,—the sard-colored cherry, and the steady green of the grape, and the flash of the cherry's vivid green leaf, and the graceful loll of the grape-leaf with its less striking green, and the wind from the lake on whose margin the tree hung, making leaves and fruits undulant as rocked by a gentle wave.

THE FOREST OF ARDEN

Across an upland leading from river to woods, birch-trees were numerous. White birch was there in plenty. What fascination is in these trees! Brown birch-bark is so beautiful as that we can neither paint nor describe it. It must be seen, and seen again, and loved, and then you want to see it again, and must. How often have I watched these trunks sardonyx in color, with the brown limbs glancing out like fire, and heard the wind whisper to the leaves as in love accents! Into every tree I looked or prodded, for the bird's-nester must have a stick. It expedites discovery, thrusting limbs aside, and so revealing the hidden house. So I hunted tree and thicket, seldom finding any nest, but always finding something. You never can miss when in this beautiful occupation. When a bird springs from a bush or thicket of fern, and seems likely to live in that special neighborhood, I nose around right manfully. The way led across an old forsaken apple-orchard, and, seeing a robin in an ancient apple-tree, I drew near and found, as I surmised, a blue-bird's nest in a knot-hole. Well done, you bird nurtured in the blue sky; this was most worthy of you. An apple-tree and a bluebird are worthy companions. Some bee-martins were cutting up didoes in the open, turning somersaults, and all for their fun and not for mine. Is n't it good to see people acting up not to be seen of any one, but solely because they are frisky? In the brakes a nest was found, place and nest both dainty. This does not often happen. Birds seldom build in weeds or growing corn or any annual. Birds begin business before plants have begun business long enough to have afforded chance for bird housekeeping. But in this brake this nest was set right cozily, and was right good to see. I walked across the upland scarred with old pine-trees and shaped into black monuments by fire, sturdy with their old-time erectness, in bleak loneliness, like black basalt memorials of what they had been, each one graven, as I fancied, with an

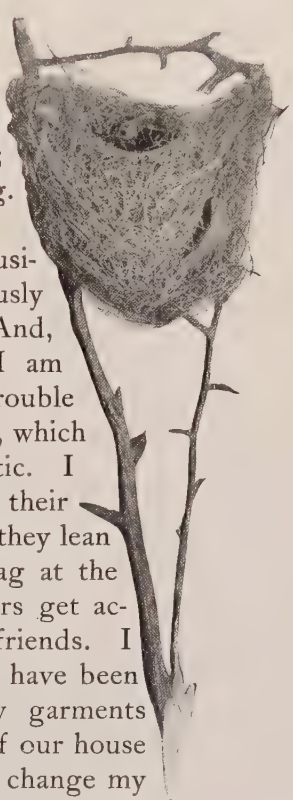
"In Memoriam." Birch-trees flouted their arms out; and on a large patch of meadow wild wintergreen grew in rich profusion, so that the air was scented with its breath. Wild blackberries are just turning from red to black; and one bramble swings out a spray of red berries on one limb, and a spray of milk-white flowers on another. I prod around everywhere, looking for birds' nests; finding very few, but finding plenty of delight and air and gladness and sense of freedom and genial foliage and new landscapes at almost every turn. In the glowing sunlight, pine-trees are standing afar, bleak even at Summer noon;

A SUMMER NEST

and as I pass at last under them, the same old wonder of music meets my ear and heart as when first I heard the lonely musings of the pine. I saunter on till I stand on a long ledge washed with sunshine, and sung to by vagabond winds, laughed at by birds whose nests I have failed to find, but in my turn laughing at what I had not failed to find; namely, the art of enjoying the day, the unhooking the muddy traces of care, the claiming kinship with the wild. O, bird's-nesting at any season of the year is good, my heart! It turns ennui out of doors, and lets in the delight of living. This day I heard a new song of a bird; his nest I could not find, but his song I found, and carry it away in my heart. All days are good for bird's-nesting; and this is one of all days.

But October is the bird's-nester's month, because then sunlight lies quiet yet glad upon the hills, and falls quietly like falling leaves upon the stream, and sifts through the flitting leaves, and seems to have soaked the cottonwood leaves with its warm golden light, though not even this drench of sunshine on them can quiet their rainfall which patters at every gust of wind. Cottonwoods hold perpetual rain as even clouds do not. But the cottonwoods have their leaves thinned out by the shears of Fall, so that nests are easily discoverable in their sprawling branches. At this time of year, late October or early November, every bird's house is, so to say, out of doors. Concealment is a thing forgotten. Where no need of hiding is, why should secrecy be maintained? Nature does not waste energies. Her modesty is a thing of sense; and when the need of it is ended, her modesty abates. I love to go along the stream, and crawl through the thickets where Winter beckons, and mosey along where the woods hold up their wan faces against the tender light with a touch of pathos indescribable on them, and make my tour of discovery of birds' nests. In Spring this woods would be a hidden land so far as birds' houses are concerned. Birds' voices, with their easy ecstasy and caroling and youth eternally renewed,—these would be prevalent, making music like a hundred violins played on by skilled musicians; but when the important mother sits wide-eyed, with an air of owning the world because her eggs advance toward feathers, finding nests would be a trick hard to do. Birds do not tell their secrets glibly. They are seemingly a garrulous company, eager to tell everything, but in reality holding secret the one thing you wish to know. But now this mother-bird is gone, and the father-bird puts his lute away, tired of blowing his sweet staccatos, and the eggs are feathered out and singing, and the shining leaves are tired of being unpaid awnings, and the birds' nests are in the open.

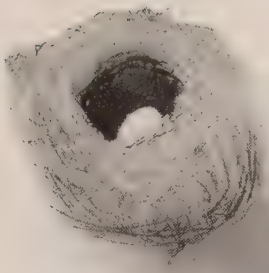
It is time for bird's-nesting. My feet will not stay under the study table; and my fingers drop the pencil in a nerveless fashion; and the skies, seen through a network of branches with a bird's nest swung here and there, obscure the page of my book so that I see it no longer. Without doubt the season is come for this parson to be bird's-nesting. Come, hands, and feet, and eyes, and thought, and heart; come, hurry: let us go to the woods bird's-nesting. Hurrah! what a thing it is to be a boy!



I will put on old clothes for this hilarious business. Not that any of my clothes are dangerously new or superlatively fine. I am no dude. And, besides, I like old clothes better than new. I am acquainted with them, and they with me. The trouble with new clothes is, they have their own creases, which are straight, and in straight lines is nothing artistic. I like clothes when they have accommodated their creases to the sinuosities of my anatomy; when they lean on my stooped shoulders, and the trousers bag at the knees and wrinkle at the shoetops, then trousers get acclimated to my figure, and we become good friends. I dislike laying them aside, although at times I have been walking along the street and have seen my garments walking along on another person. The head of our house has evidently decided that it is time for me to change my coat—as the snake does. But I confess to a homesick feeling on seeing my clothes on another man; not that the clothes care, but I care. Not that I am not generous with my old things, but we have had such times together, and we knew—my clothes and I—each other's ways and oddities; whereas every new suit seems to have a mind of its own, and designs to use me as a block to show off its own glories and fineness of material and fit, whereas, candidly, I do not like playing second fiddle so. But, aside from my general hankering after old duds, when bird's-nesting

THIS POEM

is my business I need old things. Climbing trees and sliding down trees is not conducive to the welfare of first-class garments; the tears in them, when the exploits of the trip are ended, are not elegant, and frequently the rips are made bias and construct a variety of geometrical figures which, while they are mathematical, are inferior good taste in garments. Ventilation is secured; but covering of the body is not secured, which, as I am told by those possessing information in such matters, is the real intention of clothing. Clothes are meant to cover; that is, a man's clothes are. So, on bird's-nesting days I rummage through the closet and get my old things, and find a pair of ancient shoes, and in these garments of decayed gentility set out. Now to the woods. Let me, if possible, get there in a jiffy.



PEEKABOO

Either I go alone, or one man and I go. Just one man. He likes this kind of thing. Some men tolerate it; but tolerance is not a virtue in bird's-nesting. There must be a radiant delight in the occupation. This is like making love: unless you enjoy it, there is no fun in it. And this man, this villain, despite his many objectionable features, has some redeeming traits. He is now married into my family, and it is Christian to be fraternal with him; and when I get him out alone, where there is no female to egg him on to independence of behavior, he does passably well; but put him around where the women are, and he would be bound to show off,—but sometimes I allow him to go bird's-nesting. And the spirit is good in my case, and I like to see him skinning his hands on the obstreperous bark, and making breaches in his breeches, and seeing him tumble from a tree holding a broken branch in his hands as a reminiscence of where he has been and what he has done. He acts as if he fell on purpose. According to his tell, nothing ever happens to him. He fell, not be-

cause the branch broke, but because he was in haste to come down. This is his yarn. I take no stock in that kind of talk, but it pleases him; and we get at the nests anyhow.

To go bird's-nesting to advantage, thickets as well as trees are desirable. Birds love thickets; they are not high-minded, but condescend to bushes of low estate. Loath as I am to say any word derogatory to my friends, the birds, truth must be told if a narrative is to be serviceable. What I regret to say is, that birds do not, as a rule, build nests in high trees. They should. Things gifted with wings should give themselves to aspiration. To star every topmost branch of every loftiest tree with a nest is the manifest duty of the birds. Yet, save with crows, hawks, and occasional orioles and vireos, the exception is to find tree-heights occupied by nests. Sycamores I do not recall to have seen holding a single nest. Tall walnuts are nestless. Cottonwoods have orioles'-nests, and so have maples. But even orioles affect rather the outmost branches of trees than topmost or tallmost; they tenant extremities, that is all. Birds build more in orchards with a low, slant, rooflike tree-top, or in thickets, plum thickets, wild-crab thickets, lilac bushes, little wayside thickets of any sort, sometimes in buckberry-bushes, ofttimes in a wild-berry bush.

Certain it is that birds, instead of climbing trees where they shall be near the sky, build where the earth is more neighborly than the sky. The reasons we are unapprised of; the facts we must allow. And then, too, so many birds build on the ground. Such nests you must stumble on; no eyesight can guide you, save as you watch a bird fly out from beneath your wayward feet. Last Spring some friends of mine and I were driving out to see the Spring greening the hills and brightening the willows along the stream, when we saw their pointer at point, and, going to find the cause, came on two quails, man and wife, who, with a great whir, skedaddled when we came on them;

and there, fresh made, with the dirt yet moist where they had newly hollowed it, was a hooded nest, one infrequent to be found. Whether quails fail to build hooded nests for lack of material or for lack of disposition or lack of knowledge, none is smart enough to know; but this nest was a stately habitation, and one to be proud of all a bird's days, and where we found it was in an alfalfa field, on a hillside leaning south, swept by south winds, and open to the gentle south.

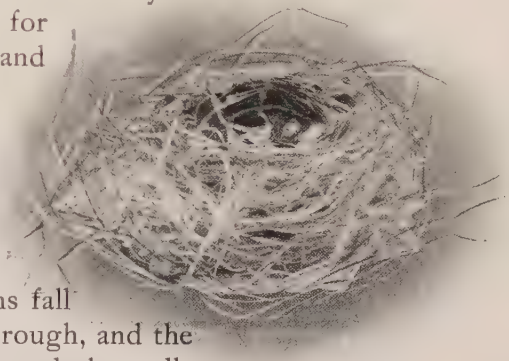
By the agnostic in bird's-nesting, this sport might be thought to be a species of brigandage. "What," says the virtuous soul, "what right have you to take possession of a bird's nest? This I call thieving." Softly, friend, softly; you speak as one of the foolish virgins. This bird came to this farm by squatter sovereignty, paid no rent, asked no odds, had his house till his family was gone and doing for itself, until pa and ma bird went off skylarking for a whole Winter and did not take the trouble to lock their door and leave the key with a neighbor, nor even shut the door. Now, clearly, this house belongs to this farm. The owner of these woods can claim these birds' houses. No; birds are not proprietors of those

> "Bare ruined choirs,
> Where late the sweet birds sung,"

They never thought of such a thing. This nest is for rent; for it is desolate. The withered leaves fill it. It is nobody's house, so we who appropriate it are not brigands, but legitimate occupants. Besides this, we are to consider that to leave birds' nests over is bad morals for the birds. If they come back next year, to occupy this old house would be to encourage laziness. And what fun his wife and himself have in building their house! Bless me, that is sport. No end of talking and flirting, and billing and cooing, and occasional fussing and occasional flying away to find lumber for the house. No, birds ought to rebuild

AFTERNOON

every Spring. It is good for their morals. They must, in the interest of their own individuality, put up a new house each year of their life. And I have not found them indisposed so to do. They want new quarters, and do not like old, weather-beaten premises. The ordinary bird is too good a housekeeper for that. She wants things spick and span new; like a bride. And so I will, as a matter of ornithological courtesy and sociological benefit, take possession of last year's birds' nests. Furthermore, Winter is not kind to a bird's nest. The rains fall in and drench it through and through, and the snowflakes fall in and freeze it, and the walls of the cozy habitation rot. Nests do not well survive the Winter's viciousness. And the winds have spite against dainty bird architecture. The Winter-long rush of winds, both boorish and ill-natured, ruin most of the pendant habitations, so far as my eyes have taken notice. So, to shorten a long matter, I think that in going bird's-nesting I am not filching, but, like the true lover of the beautiful, saving some passing form of beauty from destruction and certain oblivion. I am, like Horace Walpole, a delighter in the dainty and picturesque.



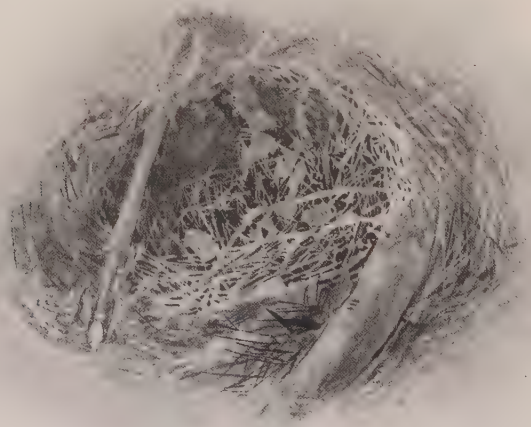
ARTISTRY

But here we are to the wood's edge. Old clothes, old shoes, old hat, and old self ready for business. We must work or we shall have no wages. The sunlight is like a smile on the face of grief, glad and pitiful. Indian Summer still baffles pursuit, like a wraith, but is forever alluring. Light cirrus clouds spread out their indolent smoke. In the higher air the vagrant winds become somnolent. There careless quiet lies. Along the hillside, where in August vines tangled like a child's curls blown in a Summer wind, you may now see everything as you walk along leis-

urewise. We must not hurry. We hurried to get here, but we must not hurry now. To haste will be to miss; and we must miss nothing. That would be sin.

Would you think that any bird would build a nest only eighteen inches above the ground in a buckberry-bush? Upon my word, here swings a nest dainty enough to hold a woman's jewels. I envy not her casket, so I have this. And I have; for I picked it from the bush. The bush belongs to me, so does the nest. What happy house-builders these birds are! I like their style of architecture. See you, how this is woven out of leaves, last year's brown leaves picked from the ravine, and made a house of for a brood. Leaves, you are honored so; and, nest, you are honored; for you shall hang in my study while the Winter winds wail along the skies and woods, and, looking at you, the woods and the hill-sides of autumn shall smile upon me like a happy face. We shall be neighbors, you and I. At my desk, while I sit with pencil and book, will I hang you, and for both of us you shall make a year-long Summer there.

And can you think of daintier nest material than withered leaves? Some nests are made of woven grasses; some of grass-roots; some of the husks of corn; some of the shreds of corn-blades; some of sticks, as the bluejay's and and the wren's; some from floating cotton of cottonwoods,



NOTHING BUT LEAVES

and dainty nests this makes, as you may note in this picture; some from buffalo-grasses woven dainty as lace; some from hair from horses' manes and tails; some from mud pressed together, as the robin does; some from the cotton-fields; and this humming-bird's nest in the picture is from California, and, strange to say—for these sunbeams do not so build—their house is built wholly of cotton. But as for me, no bird's house material is to compare with last year's leaves. They, in their turn, made music in the wind, swinging to and fro; and now it is fitting that they should build a house where musicians live, and from which winged singing folks shall pass into the sky with a shout.

This nest made entirely from horse-hair I climbed for in Nebraska. It swung at the tiptop branch of a box-elder, a tree not made for men generously gifted with avoir-dupois to climb. The nest was on the central tree-stem at the absolute apex, and where my feet stood, the branch was not larger than my index finger. But for its being the central stem of the tree and the nest being straight above, it could not have held a man of my size; but as it was, I tiptoed, while a small, freckled-faced boy on the ground hooted, hoping to see me fall, which hope I thwarted. I got the nest, and came down in hilarious temper, triumphant over the tree, the bird which built the nest, the nest, and the jeering boy. And this nest of hair was even woven with more skill. And I love to look at this wicker-basket on whose weaving two dainty birds spent happy Spring days to the sound of much music from happy hearts.

And what a climb for this nest, close-closed as to keep intruders out! But one withered leaf lies like a wee bird fast asleep, and there the leaf shall lie, while Winter rages across seas and land, until Spring comes back with beauteous merry-making. While I have my way, thou withered leaf, thy sleep shall not be troubled. No intruder shall touch thee roughly; only friends of mine shall look in on

you, who care to lean and look at a baby asleep. And where are thy birds, cuddled here in the green June month, and taught to wing their way across the tree-tops in later days? Where are you, vagabonds of the sky? Laddies, aye, but I would love to hear your voices in a song! But you are gone: your music is mute, and this leaf, which had its own melody, has lost its singing like a decayed singer, and it is quiet as a worn-out soldier fallen asleep.

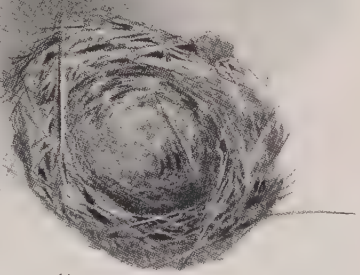
And this nest full to the brim of fallen leaves,—why, it is like a parable of the Fall. Whoever built it was democratical enough. He wove together a piece of old newspaper, a lot of strings, grassblades, threads from rushes, roots, sticks, branches, as in a hurry. Maybe he came late, or some disaster befell his house; but, anyway, how beautiful his nest is! It sprawls out in a strange, incongruous fashion, carelessly enough; yet, when the whole is considered, how beautiful the nest is, open like a neighbor's front door, ample enough for a good-sized family! Withal it is like a country house which takes much room, because ground is plentiful and cheap and we need not skimp proportions. I found this nest in a little elm-tree leaning over the stream. What jolly times this bird had all Spring and Summer through! But they heard the calling of the Southern Summer, and are gone to meet the voice.

In bird's-nesting you may always rely on the element of surprise. You count on nothing. Certain general facts will be lit upon, but lest we grow too wise in our own conceit a topsy-turvy element will run into our calculation, like sunbeams through a canopy of leaves. For instance, birds do not in our degenerate days frequent the wild woods as a body could wish. I have hunted for hours in the woodland, and found not a single nest save of hawks or crows. The city instinct is on the birds as on the folks of our community. Birds are not sylvan now. They do not love woods for the woods' sake. I was shocked at them when I first began to get this clew. When I was a novice in bird's-

NIGHT

nesting I thought that birds were sure friends of the woods and fields and remote thickets, that they were the immortal woodsmen. And when I began Autumnal trips long miles, and rode on the cars through thousands of miles of forests, and would see only a lonesome nest now and then, here and there, but would find every little village with its box-elders and cottonwoods and plum thickets and lilac-bushes and apple and peach trees fairly populous with nests, I perceived how little weight is to be given to theory, and how entirely it was a matter of experience. Crows stay by the woods, and hawks build far from the crowd, and eagles are dwellers on mountain ledge or near the sea, and the crane holds his lonely recess on the sand dune; but even blue herons I have seen build their huge, crude villages in a stone's-throw of a house. Even the birds are moving to town. Where shall we end our wonder? The other day a flock of quails was whistling right cheerily in a preacher's door-yard in a Kansas town of reputable population. Without dispute, birds are backslidden when the bob-white comes to town to watch how city folks live.

Bird's-nesting in a wild woods is largely inlucrative. In Autumn you can see a nest so far. Trained eyes can sight one as if it were a lit lamp. I have wondered at this. If the eyes be trained, it is really interesting to note how few nests can elude one as he drives never so swiftly along hedgerows and treetops, and even thickets of willow grown by the pools. The place to light on bird's nests is in town, where birds have come for reasons of their own. We must not speak with emphatic information when birds are in question. They never tell what they think or why they do. Though they are gabby little codgers, they talk about unessentials in hearing of the rabble of humanity, and tell their domestic matters in the privacy of their own family. Everything about birds is obscure. They wear a cloud about their

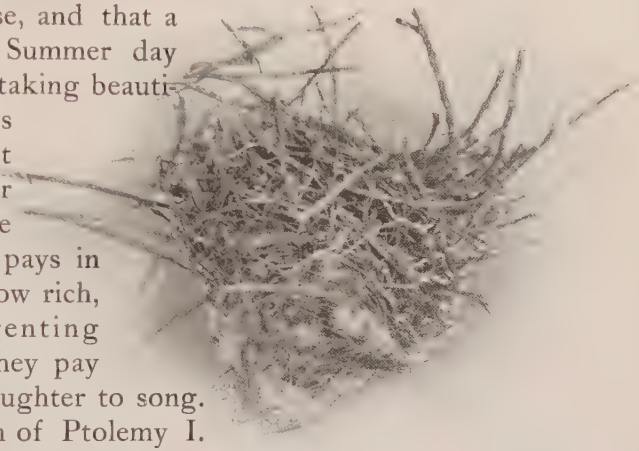


"WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRD SUNG"

hearts. But it would appear that probably birds have found that boys and girls and grown-ups are not hostile to bird communities as their wild and native enemies. This is a tribute to boys and to people generally. That birds should have found us not enemies, but friends, warms my heart and inclines me even more to my kind. Or, maybe, dinners and breakfasts are easier to get in the town than in the country. Maybe they have grown to be devotees of baker's bread like city folks; but peace to these surmises. "We burn daylight," as friend Shakespeare has observed; and daylight is too dear to burn. Standard oil is cheaper. But in town, birds and their nests are, this is certain. Woods are almost empty of their houses, and villages are filled with them. At our parsonage home in the down-town district, where smoke clouds sunrise and sunset and the young darkness so as to almost obliterate the glory of first light and last light and the gentle stars, here a blessed robin-redbreast builds his doby house, and offers his oblations of song to the God of birds and singing. And in the dim prelude to dawn his flute begins to play, and such a ruddy tune it is, wells up from his ruddy breast. I bless him for it, and have blessed him many's the time. He fingers his flute with rare delight, as if he were a troubadour with breath and love elate. "Day will- be- here- pretty- soon- pretty- soon," is what he says with his flute a-playing like the wind; and at every evening, as day tries to stifle its shining so birds and children and tired folks may fall asleep and not be bothered

FOUND ON A HEDGEROW

with the light, this blessed robin-redbreast sits on the tip-top of our house and calls "Good-night- good-night- good- goody- good-night." He is saying his prayers to music. Selfishly, I am glad the birds have moved to town and built by our house, and that a wren giggles all the Summer day long, coming late but taking beautiful possession of his porch-end room; rent free. The wren never asks what we charge for this room. She pays in song; and we shall grow rich, plutocratically rich, renting rooms to wrens, if they pay in the gold coin of laughter to song. I have a hemidrachm of Ptolemy I. It is a drop of tawny gold set with a graven face of Ptolemy on the obverse and a double-headed eagle on the reverse; and I love that drop of gold like honey stolen from some ancient hive in high Hymettus; but I love it less than this gold laughter of the Summer wrens who live with us, and who have made themselves so at home with us. Cast eyes on this porch-end nest, which, by the way, is the most elaborate bit of nesting I have ever known wrens to indulge in. This wren family evidently is no poor trash, but some wren aristocrat; and I feel fairly puffed up that they have rented our room. Red-shouldered blackbirds are willow lovers, and build a nest of rare beauty. Whether this picture catches the wonder or not, the wonder is there. I found this nest in Southern Kansas, out from a thriving village a mile or more, down where a duck-pond decoys silly ducks to their doom; and this pond was fenced in with a thicket of willows brawny and graceful and winsome in the surprise of Spring green or the gladness of Summer leaves, or the



THE WREN'S NEST

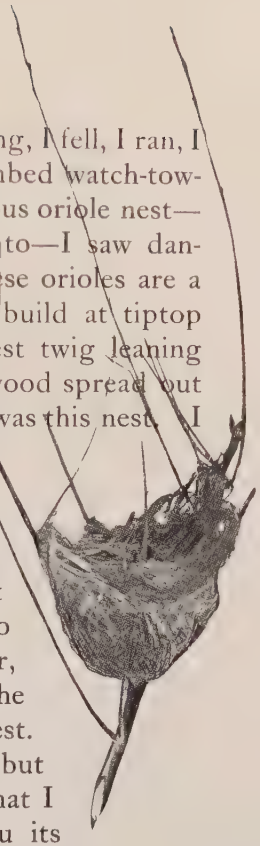
leaves touched at last with a tinge of yellow which does not quite eliminate the emerald, or where all the branches are bare and withy, and fitted to answer to the wandering winds like strings of harps. Here the blackbirds built this nest, woven of slough grasses twined with many a twining around the near branches, till neither wind nor torrent can dislodge the nest. What a happy day I had climbing the willows, looking at the sky, listening for the quick response of a blackbird's note, but listening in vain, and gladdening at sight of this dainty house where these shadowed birds had their home in peace!

And in Fall-time all nests are more or less leaf-filled. And I am not sure a nest is lovelier in my sight when hungry birds crowd it brimful, or when leaves lie tucked in like birds asleep. I have a nest with leaves and a walnut for occupants; another one with an acorn snoozing there; but leaves are always sleeping in them, unless it be a shut-door oriole nest, though even in that dainty cottage, little opened to the air or light, I have seldom seen but that a single leaf had crept in and cuddled down there on the hearth-rug. The pathos of this world is in this,—a nest emptied of birds and filled with withered leaves; but the pathos is poetry, and very dear to nearts that live abroad amongst the secrets of the world.

THE PEWEE'S NEST

What a day I had when on the Smoky Hill River I climbed from day-dawn to night-dawn after inaccessible nests; climbed and failed, skinned my shins, tore my trousers, bankrupted my buttons (which is a plain breach of our family government), fell divers times and distances, was elate as air, was submerged in Indian Summer haze, was climbing up into God's sky,—why, heart, you never fail when bird's-nesting! You always catch. This "a good catch" I

caught that day. I dawdled, I hastened, I sang, I fell, I ran, I slid, I exchanged bark with the trees, I climbed watch-towers of the world; and this absolutely delicious oriole nest—for I never saw one more perfect, nor care to—I saw dangling high and far out over the river. These orioles are a teasing folk. They do that way. They build at tiptop branches or on the far end of the farthest twig leaning across the stream. And this sunlit cottonwood spread out over the Smoky Hill; and on the last twig was this nest. I counted costs. The tree was high; the fall was great; but my life was insured, and I had an accident policy from which I have never collected a cent. All these generous motives conspired with my love for the nest to urge me on. If I fell, I would fall into the river. The sport would be the greater, but the hurt would be less than a fall on the dirt. I came, I climbed, I have the nest. You think the achievement slight, friend; but you do not know. Did I not tell you that I have the nest, and am I not loaning you its picture? You may see this nest hanging on deer antlers in my study, close to an oar broken in raging water. You shall see it when you visit the nests and me.



A BLACKBIRD'S NEST

And this dainty nest, warped and woofed with dull-gold leaves, was built in one of my apple-trees on my farm—a baby apple-tree, not taller than to reach one's girdle; and I love this nest for its shapeliness, and where it was builded, and the gay young couple that built it to the sound of merry music, for the gladness I had in finding it when the birds had just left its homely shelter to find the shelter of the sky.

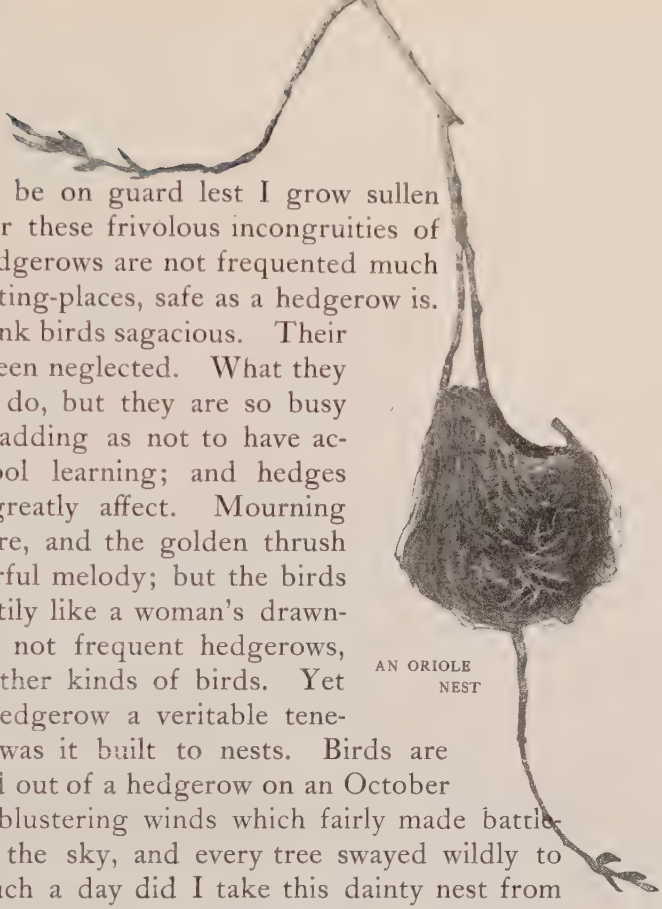
But a bird's wing or song or jesting with the wind has diverted me. I was saying how we could not count on birds. They are such uncertain folks. They love orchards; and not

many days ago I went to see good friends of mine who are not choice about their guests, and spent a day nesting in their orchard, which in May time is a sweet landscape of bloom billowing to the kisses of the wind, a long, tilting, bewildering field of fragrance and delight, a whole land-

A GOOD CATCH

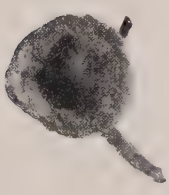
scape of bloom. In October this orchard is brilliant with miles and miles of apples, beautiful beyond the apples of Hesperides; and when flower and fruit are gone, I come to tramp the orchard through for bird's-nesting; and, to my disappointment and spunkiness, find hardly a nest is to be found in all that genial housing-place of birds. If I keep up bird's-nesting I shall grow suspicious like Tiberius

Cæsar. I must be on guard lest I grow sullen and morose over these frivolous incongruities of birds. And hedgerows are not frequented much of birds for nesting-places, safe as a hedgerow is. But I do not think birds sagacious. Their schooling has been neglected. What they remember they do, but they are so busy sparking and gadding as not to have accumulated school learning; and hedges they do not greatly affect. Mourning doves build here, and the golden thrush with his wonderful melody; but the birds who build daintily like a woman's drawn-work, these do not frequent hedgerows, nor do many other kinds of birds. Yet have I seen a hedgerow a veritable tenement so thick was it built to nests. Birds are uncertain. And out of a hedgerow on an October day wild with blustering winds which fairly made battle-charges across the sky, and every tree swayed wildly to its touch, on such a day did I take this dainty nest from a hedgerow and have hung it over a portal of this article. Why, a face carven in sardonyx by some cunning lapidist is not more chaste.



AN ORIOLE NEST

This vocation, you call it sport but you call it amiss. To me it is delightsome vocation I never tire of. Each year I come to bird's-nesting with new vivacity as I had never done it before. Life gladdens at it. I crave the honor of finding the house in which song birds learnt their melodies and from whose edges they tilted to their first timorous flight. I love each Fall to stock up my Study with new works of bird art. I like to refresh my memory on their skill and feel that they are not losing their cunning. I have to-day, of this writing, some nests which make me want to go on a lark. Here with me

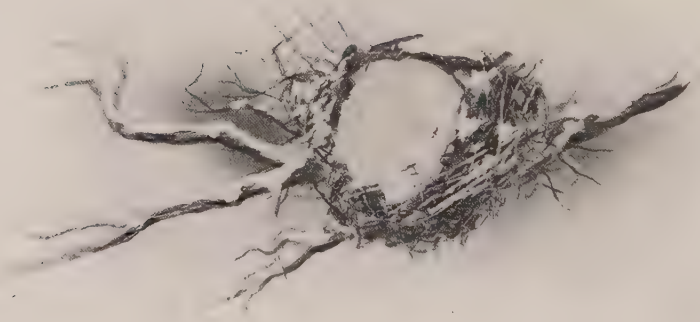


THE HUMMING BIRD'S NEST

while Winter rages across the lake and churns the icy waters into frenzy, I will have these Summer songs and signs which shall hearten me till Spring comes once again.

Bird's-nesting is good for headache and heartache. It is out of doors. It is where the blue sky draweth near. It is where the Autumn wind blows balsam of falling leaf and odorous walnut. It is where Autumn clouds dapple the sky with indolent artist's brush, and where the shadow of innumerable wings of birds of passage cross your heart, and sprays of bird-songs flash out on you like wild clematis, out where no impediment is between you and God and the sun and the flight of far-off stars hid now in daylight; but your heartache eases up a little, and the bird-folk have decoyed your heart into virginal delight,

> "And the cares that infest the day,
> Shall fold their tents like the Arabs
> And as silently steal away."



THE WINTER NEST

THE AUTUMN WIND

MOANING

SAD AUTUMN

The Autumn Wind

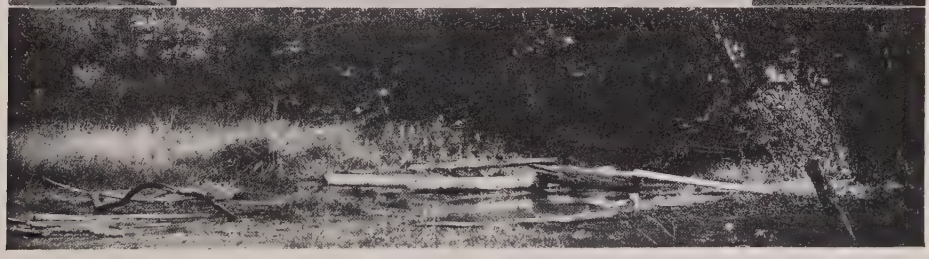
Brimful of loss and grieving,
Gray Autumn's wind am I;
And mine the song-birds leaving,
And mine the fretful sky.

And mine the sad heart aching,
O mine the drip of tears;
Mine, too, the sad heart's breaking,
That endeth but with years.

And mine the flame-leaf falling,
So loath to drift and die;
And mine the wild geese calling,
A-honking through the sky.

And mine the voice grown weary
With calling to dead flowers
Across a landscape dreary,
Where the gray rain-cloud lowers.

O mine the hopeless whining
About the casements dim,
A harp with no divining
Of bloom or hope or Him!



AND THE SEA

WHERE SEA CLIFFS TOWER

"BREAK, BREAK, BREAK"

A BRAVE ANCHOR

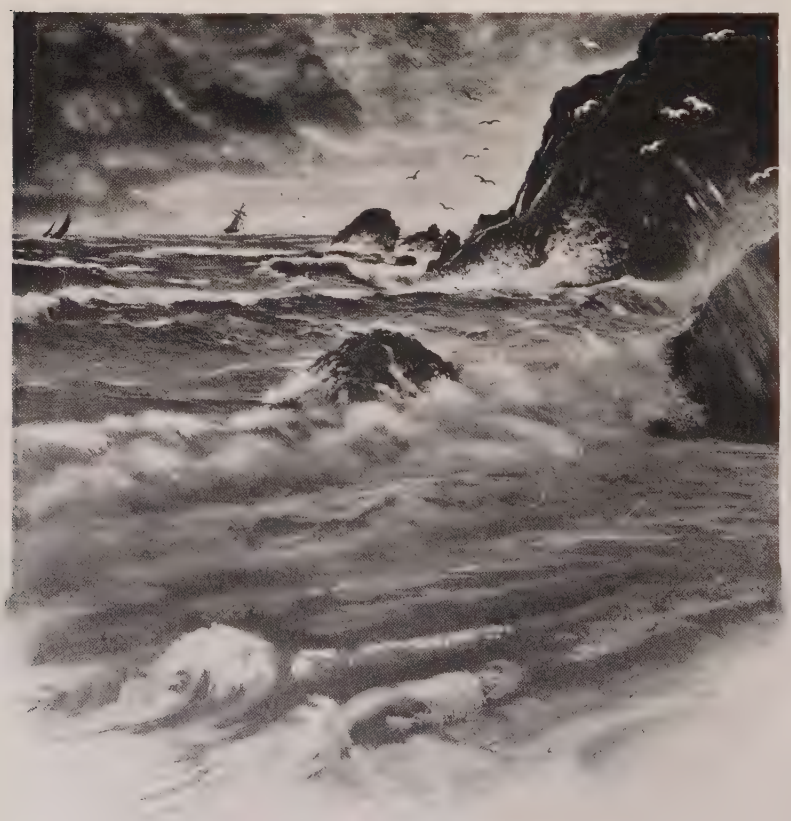
AND THE SEA

It is not given to any one to name the sea in measured speech. He loves, fears, hates, vituperates, curses, lauds, wonders at, raves over the sea, everything but esteem it placidly. The sea is like giant characters inciting to fierce antagonism or amazing fealty. It tolerates no lukewarmness. "Art thou for me or against me?" is the brutal challenge of the sea, from which is no escape.

Two things I note among earth's furniture have bewitched the poets. One is the pine-tree; the other is the sea. I have in thought, some time out of love for the sea and pine and poet bewildered of both, to make an anthology of all references all poets have made to each. 'T would be an enticing task; and the conclusion of the matter would be a complex of music of the muttering sea and the bleak anguish of the pine. For the pine, no words now. But for the sea, words that mean well, but can not hope to match the marvel of the bewildering but unbewildered deep.

Long, very long ago, when the sight of his poet eyes was nothing other than evening's memory of morning dawn, blind Homer sat listening beside the sea. Upon a headland jutting out near where Orontes spills its mountain torrent into the salt wave, you might have seen Homer, many a day at morn or night when the waves moaned against the rocks, leaning with bearded chin sunk in his hands, and his blind eyes watching as if he saw far away where blue

wave lapped against blue sky—sat and looked and listened; and now, when he could not get the glancing of the sea-wave save from memory, he gripped the sea's hand by hearing. How sea and he held dialogue those long afternoons of sightless loneliness, and what "story-telling secret" did the troubled waters bathe him in! What histories of wrecks of shattered ships, and floating of dead faces on the wicked stormy waves, did these blind waters tell to this blind poet! To a blind man what matter what secrets were imparted? He could not see to write them down. So to this brooding blind man the sea unbosomed itself, opened its gashed wounds and let him look, held out its hands torn with the wrecking of innumerable fleets of ships, blew breath of passion into its vagrant story; and the blind poet heard it all, nor let a syllable slip from his memory, but with dim hand set all the story down as in a book, in words drenched with the salt sea-spray, the old sea's story—told



"The Odyssey;" and from that far evening unto now the world has listened to his sea. This sea has haunted the centuries. "The Iliad," I take it, was the story of the eye-sight of old Homer, and "The Odyssey" the story of his ear-sight; in the one, sight abounds; and in the other, sound. In one we see the battling armies wrestle across the plain; in the other we hear the battling waves shout out across the world. And the sea that haunted Homer, haunts ourselves.

Old Hebrew listeners had heard its clamorous eloquence, and had seen its mounting waves, and had felt its awe, and trembled to it, crouched beside its dashing waters when they widened out into the sky as unafraid and filled with all wild venturings. The Hebrew felt the sea. His were not frequent visions of it. His land bordered not on the blue and plunging deep. He had no seaport; but from his far hills, as from a watchtower, he gloomed over the gloomy sea until he had its awe and sublimity by heart, as nearly as ever man has had them. Listen to what they heard and saw and said: "Look toward the sea;" "A noise like the noise of seas;" "Slain in the midst of the seas;" "Broken by the seas;" "Am I a sea, that Thou settest a watch over me?" "Broader than the sea;" "He divideth the sea with his power;" "Who shut up the sea with doors when it broke forth;" "The paths of the seas;" "Which stilleth the noise of the seas and the noise of their waves;" "Let the seas praise Thee;" "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that he did in the seas;" "Let the sea roar and the fullness thereof;" "Thou didst divide the sea;" "He maketh the sea to boil like a pot;" "He turneth the sea into dry land;" "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea;" "The sea is His, and He made it;" "The great and wide sea;" "What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?" "When He gave to the sea His decree;" "For the sea hath spoken;" "The waters shall fail from the sea;" "At my rebuke I dry up the sea;" "He hath founded it upon the seas;" "Thou stillest the raging of the sea;" "The Lord is mightier than

the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea;" "The wicked are like the troubled sea;" "Thy breach is great like the sea;" "He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry;" "Whose rampart was the sea;" "Hurt not the sea;" "Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it;" "Then He arose and rebuked the sea, and there was a great calm;" "What manner of Man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" "And there was no more sea." Such men as wrote such things touching the sea must be allowed to have drunk it like old wine. The sublimest thoughts ever expressed of the wild deep have been expressed by these Hebrews, who watched the wallowing seas from their far distant hills, and put listening ears upon the ground to catch the diapasons.

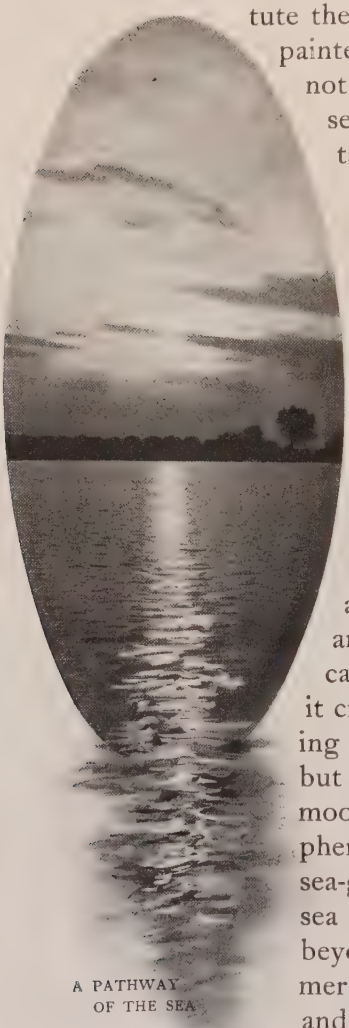
Three things have put themselves beyond the being pictured—the sky, the prairies, and the sea. You can paint no picture of the sky. You can paint its stars, or its set of sun, or its rising moon, or its atmosphere, in masses amethystine or lapis lazuli or turquoise or sapphire; but the sky, domed, spacious, glorious, refrains to sit for its portrait. And the prairie level, wide, far-going, ten-million-speared with grass blades—no artist can get its likeness. The eye can catch the breadth, the motion, the vividness, the integrality, the severalness, the variety, the breathless haste to reach the distant sky, the eternal quiet as anchored to the world; but brush can not. They labor in vain who think to snare the prairie to a canvas. 'T is as the wild things which evade the haunts of domesticity. And least of all can a painter paint the sea. All efforts are bootless. Every effort hides its face in shame, yet is ever trying with renewed attempt. The wide, wind-swept line of undulant blue, eager for the sky—who can get that? To attempt it is to depict an unpicturesque thing. The lone sea does not lend itself to being pictured. Art's brush can not

THE FRETFUL SEA

catch the wonder of level water. The brush does its best in picturing sea-cliff, or sea inlet, or level quiet of sleepy water on which ships have sunk to sleep so that not an idle sail flutters to an idle wind, nor ship hull rocks in indolence of dozing motion. Artists corral the sea, get it cornered among bleak cliffs, and then paint Norwegian fiords, or let sea-blue water laugh out in an open bay where sail-crafts cluster like a flock of snow-winged gulls, and count that a tryst made with the sea; or come by stealth where the sea lies dozing in the sun in marooned delight along lagoons of Venice, and splotch wondrous blue by blur of splendrous sails idle as an empty thought, and deem that they have caught the sea by stealth; or where sea-water wraths into wild crests that vainly strive to fisticuff the skies, the artist rages with ecstasy, and thinks he has painted the behemoth sea; or when dim morning dims the vexed sea with early light scant touched with splendor, artists sit and dip their eager brushes into the day-dawn and the sea, and make their canvas dim with early light and empty sail and empty sea, and think they have painted the sea; or when the sunset lingers loath to pass, and sets the fleets of clouds on fire with his useless torches, and the waters flame like sudden lavas, and the brink of night burns like tropic noons, then artists in frenzied mood let the glory shine its torch upon the canvas, so that cloud and sea-waves and fleets of ships and flicking sea-gulls' wing

A SEA SENTINEL

are all a glory like spilled wine; and the artists think they have painted the unshored sea. They were all make-believes, the trifling of children, who for realities substitute their happy dreams. The artists have not painted the sea. Its oceanic wonders have not been set down. You can not coax the sea for a sitting. It is as if you asked a tawny lion on the desert waste to wait to have his picture taken. He will give a cat-spring behind a dune of yellow, shifting sand. The sea can have no artist. The wide, wild, uncaged wonder of the stretch of wave is dull if put on canvas. Its vast reiterant wave on wave from sky to sky would be as empty of expression as an empty targe. You may tear a tatter of the blue cloak of the sea, and call it sea, or capture a citadel of rock and lave its base with music-making waters, and call it sea; may spray a blue sea surface with the white of ships, and name the sprayed blue a sea; may catch a sullen wave wrath-mastered when it crests toward its curl of avalanche of falling water, as saying "The sea, the sea;"—but these are not the sea. They are sea-moods, sea-tatters, fragments of a hemisphere, tangles of tortured might, patches of sea-garden glowed on by the sun; but the sea evades us. He wallows into the sky, beyond the sky, behind the sky, across meridians, across the world, vast, spheric and therefore unending, mute, loquacious, serene, outrageous, ineffable, plangent, triumphant, uninvokable, stupendous, our earth grown infinite past all pictures, crushing with its salt-sea hand all pigments, canvases,



A PATHWAY OF THE SEA

vocabularies, exclamatories,—the sea slurs artists and poets as they were rabble, and snarls his lip like some huge tiger-cat at all of them, so that to the last we must set him down as the unreproducible sea, the unpaintable sea. His waters have washed the colors from artist brushes.

SEA QUIET

And this sea is the world's giant. It owns the earth. All continents are islanded in this great deep. A hemisphere was for ages hidden in the sea, and so securely and utterly that men never guessed at its existence. A certain seagoing dreamer lit on it while he piloted his fleet toward other shores. Deserts, even great Sahara, are little kingdoms; mountains are builded on narrow strips of land; prairies are emerald banners fluttering on the ground; plateaus are tables at which the clouds sit down as guests of honor; ice-fields are headlands where the misfortunes of the world have cast their wreckage:—the sea is the finite infinity. The sea ingulfs the world. If earth were showing its trophy to the skies, that trophy would doubtless be the sea.

The sea is open to sight and wonder. The shoreless sea,—that is his prerogative. And if any were blind enough to maintain the sea had shores, to argue with such a one were wasted effort. Is not all the world apprised the sea is barrierless; that if a shore seems to build rampart against the aggressive ocean, it is seeming and no more? For what the ocean does is to make the continent an island. All solid ground is owned by the grim sea. All these are island prisoners of him. St. Helena is a prisoner of the sea, as Napoleon is prisoner of St. Helena; and the wide sea snarls round all, azures round all, frets round all, beleaguers all. Here the porpoises play; here the whales plunge in troops, like ocean cavalry; here waves lunge masterless, majestical. The sea is Cæsar of this world, and may with rightful music say, "The world is mine."

PAST A HEADLAND OF THE SEA

The sea owns all.. He is our emperor. He may crucify us or send us on laughing journey at his will; for in his iron hands we are but broken reeds, weaker than blades of grass. Nations have in their witlessness affected suzerainty of the sea, — Venetian, Genoese, Spaniard, Hollander, English; but the proud, indocile ocean hath broken their ships of Tarshish with an east wind, and asserted his own sole rulership, so that, after these centuries of warfare, nations have concluded that no one owns the sea! Lands, man may conquer, and has conquered; seas mock at man's presence, and blur blue waves with hulks of wreck from which trail the white hands of seamen drowned by wash of waves across the deck. Small wonder if this tremendousness of the sea has caught human imagination as in banks of sea-fog. A thing so huge as to wash away the limits of kingdoms and republics, and secure a territory only its own, is fitted to put fetters on the wrists of human wonder and make us prisoners. In any case, so, we are not prisoners of hope, but prisoners of the wonder of the sea.

In no other poem I know is this shoreless, sea-wandering of wind and wave and man set down in truer fashion than in Joaquin Miller's sea poem "Columbus," which is all but unapproachable:

"Behind him lay the gray Azores,
Behind the gates of Hercules:
Before him not the ghost of shores,
Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said, 'Now must we pray,
For lo! the very stars are gone.
Brave Admiral, speak; what shall I say?'
Why, say 'Sail on! sail on! sail on!'

'My men grow mutinous day by day:
My men grow ghastly, wan, and weak,'
The stout mate thought of home; a spray
Of salt-wave washed his swarthy cheek.
'What shall I say, brave Admiral, say,
If we sight naught but seas at dawn?'
'Why, you shall say at break of day,
"Sail on! sail on! sail on! sail on!"'

They sailed and sailed as winds might blow,
Until at last the blanched mate said:
Why, now not even God would know
Should I and all my men fall dead.
These very winds forget their way,
For God from these dread seas is gone.
Now speak, brave Admiral, speak and say.'
He said, 'Sail on! sail on! and on!'

SEA GULLS

They sailed. They sailed. Then spake the mate:
'This mad sea shows its teeth to-night.
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,
With lifted teeth as if to bite!
Brave Admiral, say but one good word:
What shall we do when hope is gone?'
The word leaped like a leaping sword:
'Sail on! sail on! sail on! sail on!'

Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,
And peered through darkness: ah! that night
Of all dark nights. And then a speck—
A light! a light! a light! a light!
It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!
It grew to be time's burst of dawn.
He gained a world: he gave that world
Its grandest lesson: 'On, sail on!'"

This is the glory, the pre-eminence, the fascination of the sea,

"Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!"

Magellan, Columbus, Ulysses, sail on forever, nor feel the anchoring hindrance of a port. An open sea, an endless wave!

Unpathed waters, virulent, seditious, calamitous, and wide; so wide the wideness of the sea! What a phrase that is become! We may tramp the waters for a highway about the world, and encounter no impediment; and we become immeshed in such latitudes and longitudes, so that the seas have their way with us, and will, while this world endures. Great ocean, may I launch on thee?

All the sea has is drowned in wonder. The commonplace dwells not in hearing of the sea. One-where at least is free from the invasion of littleness. It is so huge it is sublime. Men are entrapped into saying the sublime thing. When a certain great man, day after day on an ocean voyage, was given to sitting at the ship's prow and looking, looking never sated, ever eager, a garrulous prig obtruded the query, "What do you see?" "Nothing but God,"

THE RESTFUL SEA

was the reply, flung like a harpoon, but huge like a thunderbolt. The sea necessitates large sayings, is compulsive to the sublime. It is as if the sky-horizoned ocean said to every one looking upon it, "Talk to me," and every one obeys: and those varied voices are great and very tragical. The sea is the challenger to be sublime. If asked what there is in Tennyson's "Ulysses" that haunts the soul, like battle voices, blaring trumpets, hack of angry swords, neighing of wounded steeds, calling of wounded men, bullet's spit, cannons' plunging shot and roar as if they were a brood of hungry lions, and the long cry of battle tumult, the reply must be this: Ulysses is drenched with the sea. Its hunger, its roaming, its sea-change, its fearful fret, its leap of rock and surge, its white foam tangling on wave crest or island precipice,—these are here, with many voices. This is the sea's heart talking:

"I can not rest from travel. I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me and alone: on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name."

"I am a part of all that I have met:
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravel'd world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move."

"And this gray spirit, yearning in desire
To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

"There lies the port. The vessel puffs the sail:
There gloom the dark broad seas."

"The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and, sitting well in order, smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the Western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down; but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, but not to yield."

The sea hath fought its way into the heart, and compelled the larger mood to call its summons.

And the sea music! Ah, heart, have you, have you heard that melody? When organs in dim minsters fill all the shadowy spaces with music wave on wave, cumulative, uplifting like a wave, wistful, calling like voices we love, but long since lost,—when we hear such organ music we are apt to think this is the climax of all melody. It fairly storms the soul. You are at once lifted and enveloped by these staccatos and crescendos; but once hear the sea play its anthems, and all organ voluntaries become shadows of sound. To stand at night below the cliffs of some great sea on the bruised rocks, and hear the orchestral sea begin its fugue, long breaths of murmurous music, wild gusts of threnody, anguish put into a tune, heartache finding vent once and for all, sorrow and grieving given free and novel exponency!—O heartache and heartbreak, the ocean is your musician! Nothing can spell sorrow out like the sea; and when a rent heart was listening for a voice to bleed out its hundred anguishes, that heart prevailed upon the sea to compose a psalm to sob out heart-sorrow evermore; and this is what the sea wave sobbed:

"Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

EBB TIDE

THE INFINITE SEA

Many is the night when, under somber skies, I have lain all alone on sea-sands drenched with voices. No star was lit: no beacon flung light on the black sea-wave: the vault of silent sky: the lone, bleak stretch of sand: and then the sea-wave music! How it conquered the world! How it drenched the shore like an angry wave! How it filled the gray vault from marge to marge! The ocean music knew no barriers, asked no leave, only swept the ocean free of music, and spilled it on the land and sky and me. It is an hour to date life from backward or forward. The long sob of the sea, the tearful calling of the homeless waves which make any heart, listening, to feel the pangs of orphanage. O chief musician, thy name is Sea!

And when winds blow from off the million-acred meadow of the sea, clean, brisk, strong, fitted to belly listless sails of sluggard ships, to dash them on swift as flocks of clouds; to feel and breathe the sea-wind; to hear it whispering to the sails and moaning to the masts, for it has learned the art of moaning from the waves; to feel and hear the soft sea-whisper to the sea-wind's breath, "We come, we haste, we go, we can not wait; and you, poor heart, you come, you haste, you go, you can not wait; we that are pilgrims, you and I, a sea-wind I, a sea-breath you, both blowing out across the spacious sea into the infinite:" and the sea-wind's caress melts from the face, and the voice fades to a whispering and is gone; it hath outblown us to the infinite. This poet, Arthur Ketchum, has felt this passing sea-wind and won its secrets:

"Winnow me through with thy keen, clean breath,
Wind with tang of the sea!
Speed through the closing gates of the day,
Find me and fold me; have thy way,
And take thy will of me!

Use my soul as you used the sky—
Gray sky of this sullen day!
Clear its doubt as you sped its wrack
Of storm-cloud bringing its splendor back
Giving it gold for gray!

A SAD SEA CLIFF

Bring me word of the moving ships,
Halyards and straining spars;
Come to me clean from the sea's wide breast,
While the last lights die in the yellow west,
Under the first white stars!

Batter the closed doors of my heart,
And set my spirit free!
For I stifle here in this crowded place,
Sick for the tenantless fields of space,
Wind with the tang of the sea!"

And the sea holds the wonder of the ships. When racing tides tug at every ship keel as calling "Outward bound," to stand upon a headland and watch the fisher fleet put out to sea at evening, while round it, with many a cry, the seagulls lift and fall like bits of ocean spray, and sunshine flames on every chestnut sail until it, in turn, flames like a dull fire, or paints every white sail into a snowy whiteness, and the tide tugs insistent to be gone, and the sea beckons,

and the sunset waits, and women beckon from the rocks, and the light upon the headland is lit ready for the night and fishermen's voices lift in a song or swaying work call, and fresh sea-winds at the harbor's mouth catch limp sails and lift them into buoyant vigilance,—watch the fisher fleets, which are the very poetry of the wide sea, man's poetry learnt from the poet Ocean. A boat's prow is most beautiful of all things man has made. And this is saying much; for man has proven himself an artist of quaint skill, and has carven precious stones into refulgent loveliness, and wrought tawn gold in flowers and arabesques exquisite as the tendril of a vine. But his pre-eminent achievement in artistry has been the boat-prow, the sight of which moves the soul to encomiums and triumphs. In "Harbours of England," a book unhappily too rare, Ruskin has put this poem of the Ocean into the poetry of words; and if prose has ever been amber to pure loveliness in tenderer, more receptive, more triumphant fashion, I do not know of it. To omit this description would be to rob the sea.

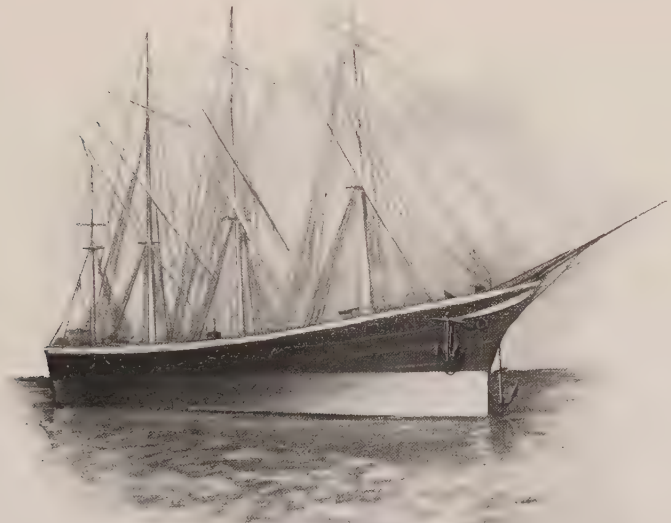
Having said of "the blunt head of a common, bluff, undecked sea-boat lying aside in its furrow of beach-sand," "The sum of Navigation is in that," he proceeds: "It is wonderful on account of the greatness of the enemy that it does battle with. To lift dead weight; to overcome length of languid space; to multiply or systematize a given force: this we may see done by the bar, or beam, or wheel, without wonder. But to war with that living fury of waters, to bare its breast, moment after moment, against the unwearied enmity of ocean—the subtle, fitful, implacable smiting of the black waves, provoking each other on, endlessly, all the infinite march of the Atlantic rolling on behind them to their help, and still to strike them back into a wreath of smoke and futile foam, and win its way against them, and keep its charge of life from them: does any other soulless thing do as much as this?" The boat's prow may fittingly do obeisance to John Ruskin, poet.

These bold, adventurous ships, sea-soaked, far-going, storm-enduring, schooled to perils, prow pointing to every port the compass knows, lured by the hot waves of tropic sea, scratched on by the rude fingers of passing icebergs, way lit through nights of gloom by phosphorescent glow, lying becalmed in doldrums of southern seas, shrewd geographers to know every port where ships put in, blithe as sunlit wave, harsh as the winter's sea at night, glad to fight the ocean when with causeless anger it tries to stamp angry heel upon the decks of ships and make them sink and rot in the dusky, hid valleys of the sea, answering to the helmsman's touch as to the thrilling touch of love, unbewildered by any mad onslaught of the infuriated sea, every plank so soaked with salt waves until in wreck they burn like chemic lights, masts that catch and hold the fluttering banner of a sail as if it were the outstretched wonder of a sea-gull's wing, prow to break the blue deep into hemispheres, ships held at anchor by anchor fluke, and some sad day—for such the fate of ships—to rot in wreck along some barren, sandy shore, or float a derelict along uncharted highways of the sea,—O ship, O ship in all, your life is like to poetry and charged with all the majesty of the great sea.

Who has written or can write the story of the anchor? That hope of safety, when through the wild storm the sailors hear the booming of waves upon the rocks, and know that, beyond subterfuge, death is very near. And from the ship prow or on the idle deck the anchor hangs or lies like a dull thing of sloth, until, with wave-drenched hands, the sailors heave it into the boiling sea, and wait to feel the happy thrill of ship a-shiver to the anchor's grip, and feel the thrill and call with boisterous glee, "She holds, she holds!" and the surf booms on the rocks, and seas drive over the lifting and the falling ship, and the anchor holds till the wild storm abates and all the sea grows calm. But who shall write the epic of the anchor?

THE SUNSET SEA

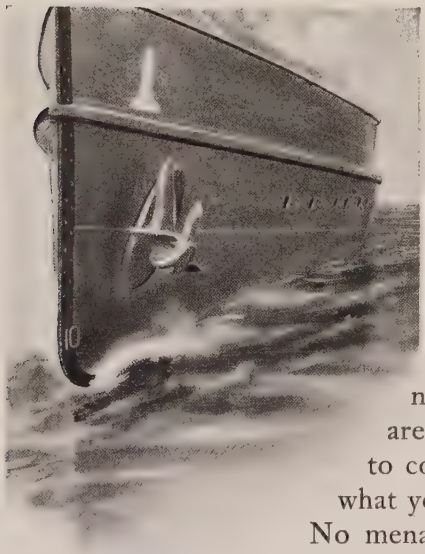
What a glorious thing a sea-cliff is! Neighbor to ocean and to cloud, sung to by ocean waves and winds, wet by ocean sprays, bases polished by centuries of waves, lunged at by the stormy sea, caressed by the tides, perfumed by sea-breath, crowned by heather purple, or tufted by ragged pine, or pinnacled by bleak rock, folded in by gray sea-mists, and so hidden oft both from sky and sea, plunging downward to sea-depths, climbing upward to sky-heights, home for nesting sea-gulls, black promontories against



OUTWARD BOUND

which sea-driven ships hammer into ravelings of ropes and slivers of mast and spar and plank of keel—sea-cliffs are majestical. About their feet is the free play of plunging ocean surf. There salt waves tangle into spray, and rain back a million opals to the sea. Sea-caves drive backward to tunnel the island with music. Sea-grasses cling along acclivous ascents. There the sheep-path winds and the lambs bleat, finding their mothers. There gulls fling wild, raucous voices toward the sea, and samphire gatherers ply

"their fearsome trade," and the shore of the sea climbs up the black cliff side like sailors rescued from a frightful sea. Sea-cliffs, you have your wonder of scarred front and polished surface like a porphyry vase, and your severer wonder of resistance. You menace the menacing sea. You meet wrath with calm, but break the wrathful waves to feeble water-drops. You answer onset with repulse. You meet the wrinkled brows of ocean wrath with a smile, but with defeat. If now and then the wild waves tear a rock away from you, it is only a keepsake you have offered to the sea. You stay and stand. The hammering waves curse you with voice and fists, while you doze in content as thinking the ravaging waters sing a lullaby. You bear the brunt of numberless assaults, but are in nothing wearied and in naught dismayed. You never answer voice with voice. You are mute as death, but are impervious to conquest. "Thus far, no farther," is what your mute defiance answers to the sea. No menace can affright you. No charge of all the cavalry of angry seas makes your gloomy might afraid. Across your lacerated front the centuries have writ, "Unconquered by the sea." The brutal sea, how it hacks with its cruel ax, ruthless as a Goth. It does not seek equals to do battle with. There are no equals for the sea. Battle is his desire, and any foe will answer. A child, an army, a bridge of ships, a braggadocio king, a tiny shore-boat in which little fisher lads make holiday, a huge ship made for an armada, a lover and his beloved, a galley-slave ship, a Roman trireme, a ruddy-limbed bather, a baby wading out laughing into the surf,—the sea will harry all to their death. The curls



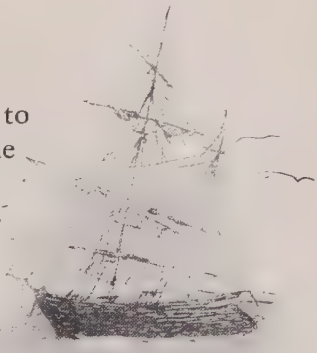
REJOICING IN THE SEA

of the baby head float their ringlets on the crystal water like a curl of sea-weed: and the sea is conqueror. Great sea, and shalt thou bare thy wrestler might to wrestle down a babe? Shame, shame, great sea! But he is frenzied for victory, and cares not that we snarl at him. He ruins fleets. He sets the trireme floating helpless, with slaves drowned chained to the rowers' benches. He breaks the slave-ship in his cruel hands, and spills all its black freight into the an-hungered sea, which gulps it down like a drink of wine. He hammers drowned sailors against the jagged rocks till they are human pumice crushed beyond all recognition. He drowns the mother with her babe tied against her heart by a white arm of love. All are pursued by the murderous, rapacious sea. This sea, sparkling in the sun, racing in riot of gladness in answer to the wind, purring to itself in sheer content, and then with smiling look springing like a sudden arrow to somebody's death. O sea, O ruthless sea! On some fisherman far to northward, where boreal lights are his candles, there your cold sea-wave mounts and leers and lifts its wicked crest, and deluges the boat-deck with icy waters; you leap with tiger leaps and clutch the fisherman, and hurl him in the caldron of refluent waves; and she who loves him watches for his home-coming all in vain. A white face staring for a moment into the dumb sky, a strong arm striking madly at the mad sea and a call,—a woman's name half spoken, and the name of Christ shouted to a vanishing wave;—and a woman watches on a barren headland wiping her tears away to look, while

"The harbor bar is moaning,"

and weeps her slow way home at darkness, to kneel and call, "O God, my husband—and the sea!"

Yet is the sea beneficent. The rain is donative of the sea. The snows upon the mountain-peaks are drifted hither from the sea. On



RIBS OF WRECK

the wide ocean caldron is brewed health for the world. And the sea hath tides. They are the pulse-beats of the sea, the tireless wonder of the tireless deep. Tides are the sea-answer to the sky, so that in every recurring tide is the pathos of unfulfilled desire, the pathos of soaring eagles with the broken wing. The moon beckons, and the sea aspires, and tides essay to climb the shores that thus they may climb the sky, which thing they could not do, but this other thing they did; they washed the stenched harbors of the planet, drained foul rivers into the sanitary sea, swam up the river ways, and brought ill health from inland to cleanse it in the plunging sea. But for the seas this world would die in the pest-house. So the aspiring of the sea, while it can not scale the sky as its endeavor was to do, brought service of cleansing so that its aspirings were not in vain. All serving comes from the attempt to climb the sky. How the tides run! Along the shores, up far inland along shallow streams, the tides run daily like a happy heart, and turn the rivulets and river to running uphill toward the sky, and muddy river-beds are full of crystal sea, and boats, lying useless hulks like wounded birds forsaken of beauty and buoyancy and motion, now float, like unmaimed sea-birds, to the lurchings of the tide, and through green marshes run the thousand silver threads. The tide is rising, let the land be glad. The breathless, rolicking, gleeful, far-journeying, unwearied, happy, happy tides, whose comings are in truth the gladness of the world!

The sea is sailing room for icebergs, those ghosts of the sea. Some I have myself seen. The memory of them thrills me now. They were full of poetry. They were so far from home, were such lonely emigrants and blind. Stately they are as blind Homer, and as pathetic. They are going on a pilgrimage which will end in their death, though I think they do not know it. I hope they do not. Some of the bergs were mere ice-boats heavily laden, so that the decks were almost or altogether on a level with

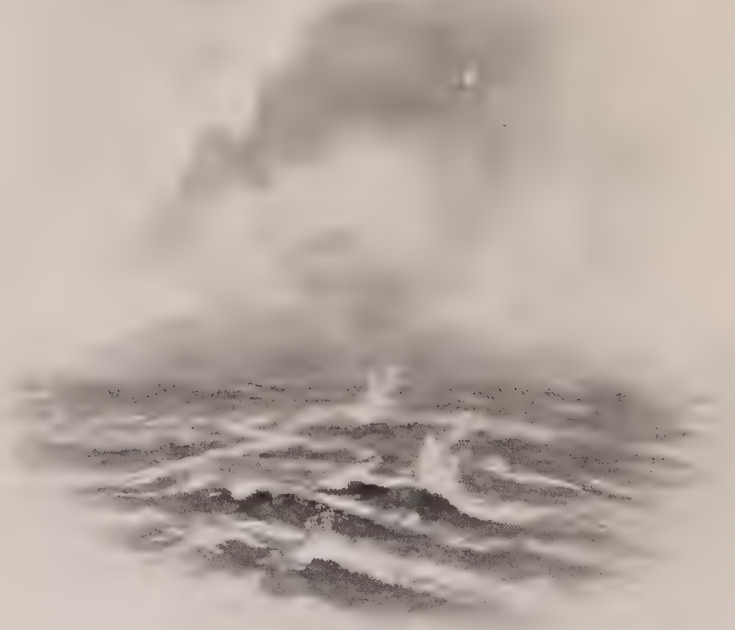
THE BEWILDERED SEA

AT ANCHOR

the water. One stood up like a crag of crystal, radiant with light, jutting above the sea, and when we had passed by, and the sun was behind the berg, it stood bleak like black basalt, sullen and desolate. Another looked as it sailed to meet us, like a viking's ship, with high and stately prow and stern lifted gallantly from the water, and all a sheen of silver. This boat belonged to some princely viking, that is clear. How else should it be panoplied in silver? There was not a soul on deck. No man was at the helm, and the oars were lost, and the dark night was settling on the sea; and the berg floated, not silver now, but white as ocean spray—white, white, so white and solitary! No fleet, no following, and the captain and the crew are slain: and the boat captains its own way across the murmuring waters. I leaned over the ship's side, and watched and watched, till the forsaken craft dropped below the horizon of darkness. One giant berg went by, by stealth, at early morning (two o'clock); but having my head set to see the most that might be seen of this sight of a lifetime, I was on watch. And as he walked like a ghost in his white garments and silent tread, I was there to see him pass. I have not seen many sights so haunting to the

memory as this silent passenger on the seas, flitting past us in the night.

One other great berg I saw near at hand on a day deluged with sunshine. As seen from the westward side it was white as snows drifting, and huge as a dozen steamers. It flashed like living glory in the bewildering light. The chisel of the waters had hollowed out sea-caves in its mountain side, and at last, as we drove on past, it lay for all the world like a thunderhead lies along the fringes of the sky in summer. To see this voyager from a far zone, was worth a journey across the Atlantic. I can see that glittering pageant yet, and shall see it forever. That is one of the glories of the mind; great sights and dreams stay in the heart for all the lifetime of the soul. And yet I know there are nobler bergs than mine eyes have seen—strange, great crafts from the shadowy North bearing southward, spectral, many-spired, Gothic, crystal, like the towers of



THE FISHER FLEET

heaven, scintillant in the sunlight, undeviating, skilled to crush hapless ships that venture across their path, merciless like all that appertains unto the sea, beautiful past all artist interpretation, fated yet undismayed, part of the mystery of the sea, tongueless, wintry, desolate, yet journeying toward the city of the Sun.

There are days of storm on the ocean. I shall never let the memory of them be torn from the book of my heart. They were days royal and majestic. To see the long waves coming from afar, lifting up burly forms into the long swell of a hill-wide valley, in which brave ships could float; high-crested, across which ships must run with staggered motion; wild waves, which broke in fury over the deck, and frothed out into the angry sea again. Then were we past all poetry, "rocked in the cradle of the deep." And what lullabies the waters sing, and how they rock with tireless foot the courageous ship! When the sky is gray as twilight, and the billows stoop along the sea as if their shoulders were heavy with the burden of ships, and when the water froths and billows at the ship's prow, and the long waves roll on across the sea that makes your door-yard, and the ship sags and writhes like a living thing, and the wind shrills through the rigging, and the night begins to blacken all the sky, and the brutal ocean smites his huge fists against the vessel as in sheer pompousness of brutality, and a baby's cry mixes with the hurricane, and man is impotent and the sea is omnipotent,—then, O then, is the ocean majestic! And Love stood on the deck and laughed aloud. The frenzy

of the ocean was mirth to my spirits. On stormy nights like these, my ancestors fought their way to an ocean grave. And their storm-sea makes my spirit revel and be glad. But who shall ever match with words the sublimity of a wrathful sea? Shakespeare felt the craze of it in "The Tempest." St. Paul has immortalized one storm on the Great Sea over which he sailed a prisoner. Conrad, in "The Children of the Sea," has felt the drench of omnipotent and furious seas more than any man who ever breathed. But who can measure words equal to this tragic wonder? The cliffs of storm; the roar that silences the cannonry of battle so that you could not hear all their wild anger speak; the leap, the green fury of crescendo waves, the turbulence, the disaster, the hopelessness, the despair, the dishevelment of wreck, the planks and spars and dim dead faces washing on the sea, the unmitigated passion of the waters wrathing against man and God, the waves driving shoreward fast as the flight of stars, the crush and amazement on the rocks, the lift of spray until it mingles with the sky,—O voice, why vex the theme with words? A storm is on the sea!

And the sea? Truly. The great, affable, outrageous, angry, laughing, heartless, surly, captivating, hilarious, tempestuous, tyrannical, brutal, unreasonable, baffling, serviceable, health-bringing, death-dealing sea is all about us. Shall I ever tell how much I love it, or be weary of its wonder, or forgetful of its mystery and majesty! I am one of those who hope for high seas on the north shores of heaven, by whose margin I may sit on quiet evenings while the angels sing, and listen to sea voices while the tender undertone of the amazing ocean shall make a melody untouched with tears or any memory of death in its solemn music.

CONQUERER OF THE SEA